

anime
INSIDER 超月刊誌

59
may

DEATH NOTE | ONE PIECE | HAIKU CONTEST WINNERS | BAMBOO BLADE | GARDEN OF SINNERS

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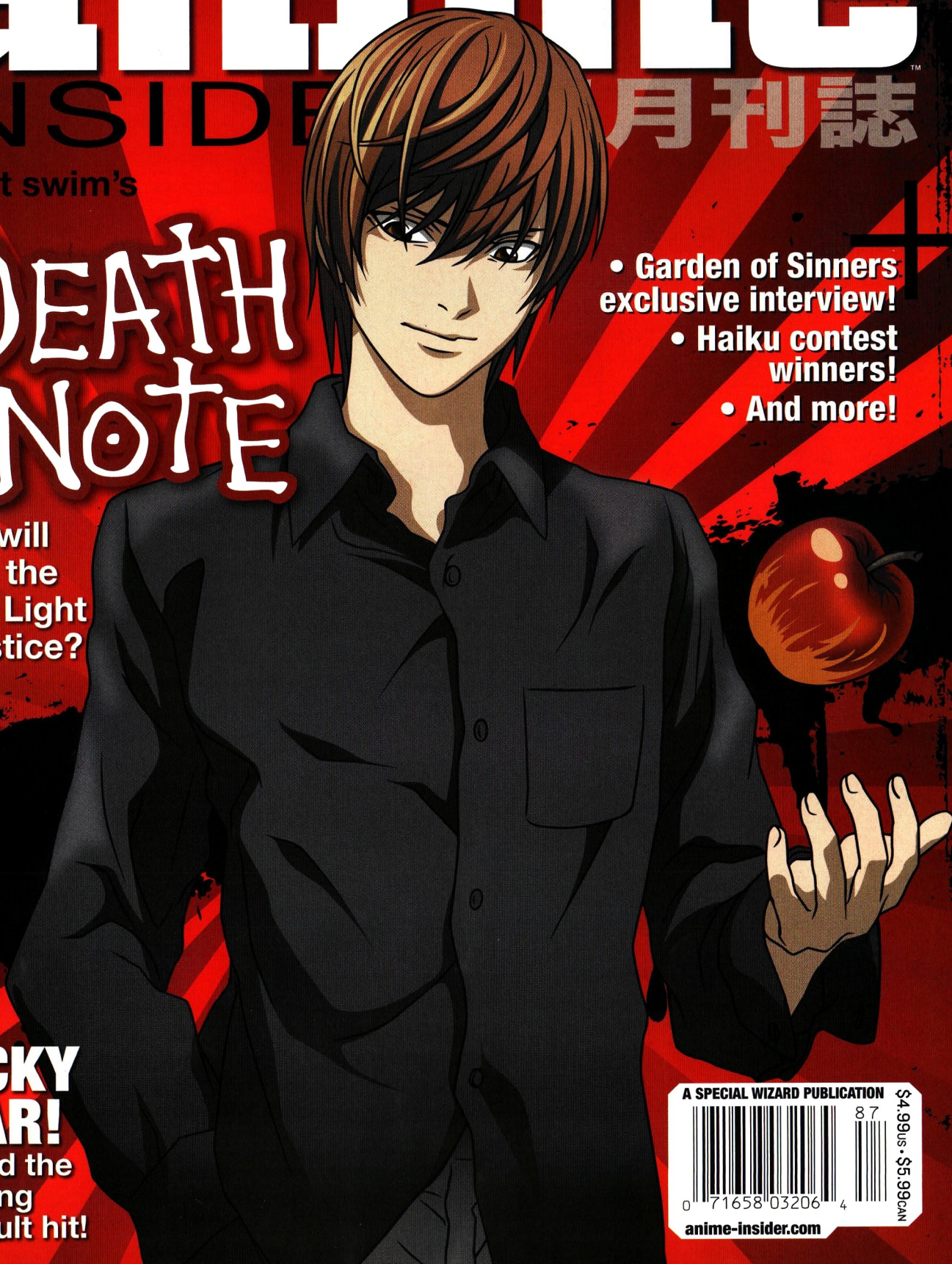
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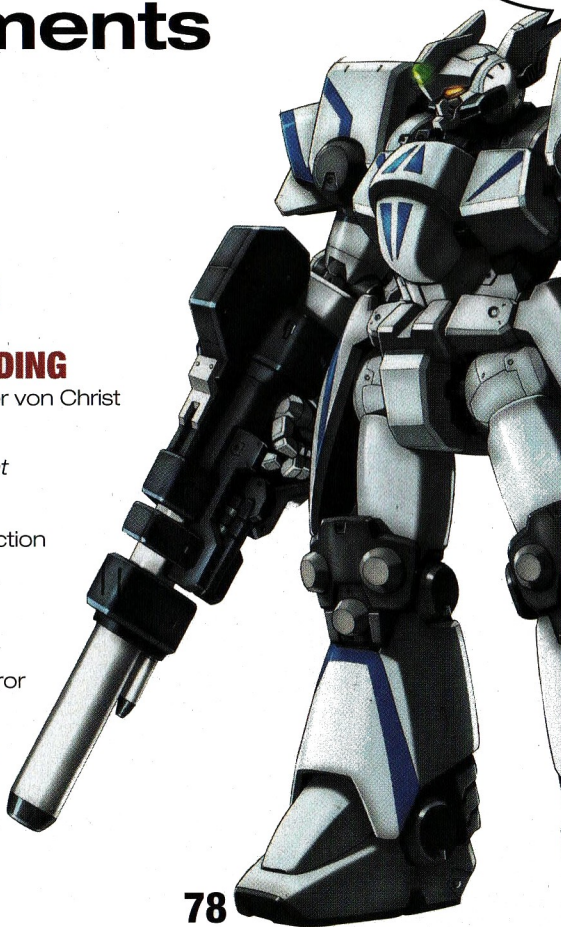
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Light Yagami continues to elude the task force committed to ending his murderous conquest, but can he keep it up forever? He's made it this far, but fallen detective L isn't Light's only obstacle. Discover who could bring about his downfall in our *Death Note* feature on page 46.

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fromthetop 無恥陳列

May day!

You might have started to suspect it, but even though the date on this magazine says "May," we write all of these amazing articles a little in advance. After all, we need time to make the features look pretty, get the files to our printer, actually print the magazines and then ship them to the warehouses for all the stores that sell *Anime Insider*. Are we busy? Always, and doubly so this month, because we had to do our regular work, plus judge all of your haiku contest entries!

You might recall that back in our 50th issue, we ran our biggest contest ever, offering bucket loads of prizes to the five most awesome haiku submitted. We received almost 2,000 haiku! And yes, we opened and read every last one of them. Even the ones about yams.

Unfortunately, some of you didn't read the rules very carefully. There were only a few rules, but many people still decided to walk to the beat of a different contest, which meant that we had to toss out a lot of really great entries. For the exact figures, and the five funny-bone-tickling winners, turn to page 34.

Still, we were so impressed with the spirit of all the entries that we all wrote our own haiku about the contest itself! Here's mine:

Please read directions

Your humor makes me laugh but

One per envelope

So you may not have won this time—check out the winners, have a laugh and stay tuned for more contests in *Anime Insider*!

James J. Mullins

Summer Mullins
Editor



MAYDAY, MAYDAY The deluge of haiku entries left us signaling our surrender.

MASTHEAD

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MEET THE PRESS

What's your response to the haiku contest?

TODD CIOLEK

Associate Editor

Entry from old man
About Sailor Moon's long legs
Handle it with tongs



ANGELA HANSON

Assistant Editor

Pink cherry blossoms
Falling as we judge for hours
Give me some caffeine



ANDREZ BERGEN

Tokyo Correspondent

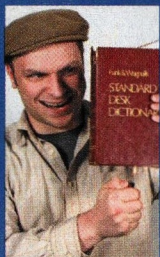
Missing in action
Sweet tyranny of distance
Poem from abroad



BRAD BOWERSOX

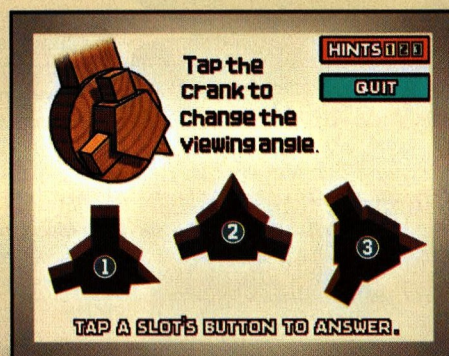
Designer

Oh—five seven five
Syllables goof me up 'cause
Designers hate words

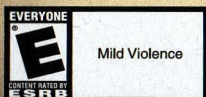


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and the
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FIGHTING SPIRIT

Looks like my rough-and-tumble ways are starting to ruffle a few feathers out there in the world of anime fans. Too bad, boys and girls! I'm too old and bitter to lie to make you feel better, and someone out there needs to tell you guys the truth about anime and the industry. I'm well aware this will irritate a few people, but I've never backed down from a fight (well, a fight of words—I have delicate hands), and I'm ready to take on all comers in the squared circle known as "Animail." I'm ringing the opening bell, so hit me with your best shot.



CODE GEASS' LELOUCH

A MAN IN JAPAN

I've recently returned from living in Japan for a year and a half and I'd like to thank you for keeping me up to date with what's been happening in the American anime/manga market.

I picked up your mag every month at Tower Records in Shinjuku, and after that, as any American otaku would do, I spent the bulk of my time in Akihabara and Nakano Broadway after being so inspired by your magazine.

What I'd like to know is if several titles have been licensed for U.S. release, or maybe the chances of them being licensed:

- *Lucky Star*
- *Fist of the North Star* (New movies and OVAs)
- *Gundam 00*
- *Neon Genesis Evangelion 1.0: You are [Not] Alone*
- *Code Geass*
- *Persona -trinity soul-*
- *Macross Frontier*

I know that's a long list, but any information you could give me would be greatly appreciated.

Dave
Via cyberspace

The knowledge that American anime fans are buying A.I. in Japan pleases me to no end, Dave. I'm happy to answer 'em all for you.

- *Lucky Star*—licensed by Bandai Entertainment for DVD release this month! See our feature on p. 26.
- *Fist of the North Star*—ADV released the 2003 OVAs a few years ago, but no one has the new movies and OVAs.
- *Gundam 00*—not announced, but I'll bet that it will go to Bandai.
- *Neon Genesis Evangelion 1.0: You Are Not Alone*—will likely be announced this summer. The bidding's got to be hot and heavy on this one, so expect it from a much larger company than usual.
- *Code Geass*—licensed by Bandai and airing on Adult Swim as you read this.
- *Persona*—no one's announced it yet.
- *Macross Frontier*—will most likely never be licensed thanks to the same tangle of international legal rights that are holding up *Macross Zero*.

MON AMIS

Hey, could you guys settle an argument my dad and I are having? I am a huge *Digimon* fan, but whenever I watched it, he would come in and call it a cheap rip-off of *Pokémon*. I told him that in all actuality, *Digimon* came first, but he refuses to believe me. I figure that if I showed him the answer in print, we can finally have this settled. So, how about it? Was *Pokémon* or *Digimon* first? Much love!

Kristeen Hayden
Via cyberspace

Father knows best. The Pokémon game was released in 1996, followed by the anime in April 1997. The Digimon toys debuted two months later in June 1997, followed by the Digimon anime in March 1999. Thanks for the love, though!

DEATH NOTE

Do you know what's awesome? Your magazine.

Know what's even better than that? *Basilisk*.

Know what the best thing in the world is?

Being on disk 3 of *Basilisk* and then reading "The Best O' the Best 2007," where *Basilisk* is mentioned. At the top of the page. In bold letters, "Best Death—Oboro and Gennosuke." Couldn't skim past it if you tried.

Ruining a KICK ASS anime? Priceless.

Tonya Martini
Las Vegas, NV

*Oh, Tonya! I'm so sorry that we discussed a series that had finished its American release in March of 2007. But I'm even more sorry that you could make it through three whole DVDs of *Basilisk* and still think that anyone was going to get a happy ending. Life's going to be tough for you.*

Spelling Basilisk correctly? Also priceless.

BUDGETARY CONCERNS

What's up? I have been a fan of A.I. for years since the beginning. This has been bugging me for a bit. I am a HUGE fan of giant robot anime such as *Gundam*, *Big O*, *Eureka Seven* and all of that. My question is who foots the bill for building these machines? While they do look cool, the people that own them don't look like they have billions of dollars lying around to build, let alone maintain, these things. So WHO PAYS FOR IT? I just wanna know and keep up the good work.

Mr. Glass
Hartford, CT

I believe most giant robots are funded entirely by my gashapon purchases whenever I go to Tokyo, actually. Japan just kind of puts that money aside in a giant Hello Kitty bank.

JUST SAY MEW

Hello, I'm an amateur manga/anime artist and I wanted to ask a couple of questions. First off, do you have any tips on drawing demonic cats, maid outfits, swords and Pocky? And do any of you think there is any chance that someone OTHER than 4Kids that might pick up the license for dubbing Tokyo Mew Mew?

Itoe Oguri

Somewhere in California

- 1) Use pen and ink.
- 2) No. No chance at all.

WAGES OF SENTAI

A friend of mine and I were watching a show called *Shinesman* and she made a comment about it being a "Power Rangers rip-off." I told her that *Power Rangers* was based off a Japanese television show called *Sentai* and that *Shinesman* was likely just one animated version of the *sentai* genre (color coded super hero). She said I was crazy and that Japan could never come up with something that ridiculous on its own. Could you please set this straight, just in case I'm wrong?

Rina Waugaman
Via cyberspace

You're not 100% right, but your friend is the new champion of being wrong. "Japan could never come up with something that ridiculous"? Japan owns the copyright on ridiculous TV series, anime or otherwise. Sentai isn't a specific TV series, but it is a genre, the one where a group of heroes—usually five, and usually color-coded—fights bad guys. Voltron is almost as much a sentai series as Power Rangers is (and Sailor Moon is pretty darned sentai, too).

But there's also the specific "Super Sentai" series, which refers to any of the long-running series of TV shows produced by Toei, Bandai and TV Asahi, which have been turned into the Power Rangers series here in America. The "Super" part comes in because the color-coded rangers get large robots. Shinesman is supposed to be a parody of the Super Sentai shows, and for my dime it does a great job.

LIGHT AND WRONG

I am an avid watcher of *Death Note*. My two questions are 1) When will *Anime Insider* do a cover story on *Death Note* and 2) could you guys do like an online survey to see if more people support L or if they support Light? Thanks for your input!!!

Jevone Lawrence
Atlanta, GA

Not only can we do it this issue, we can do it in the



past! Go to wizarduniverse.com and order issue #48. As for the poll, I'm going to invite readers to mail or e-mail me what you think: Is Light doing a good thing, or should L be the hero since he's trying to catch Kira? I'd like to know what you think.

GIVING US WHAT-FOR

Since I want to make this easier for you I will put everything in this neat, fancy list form:

- 1) I LOVE your magazine, keep up the good work.
- 2) I'm a huge *Black Cat* fan and I was hoping you guys could do an article and/or Casting Call for that anime.
- 3) Although *Howl's Moving Castle* was supposed to be his last film, I heard Miyazaki-sama was working on something new. Do you think you could dig up some information on that?

Mellissa Costine
Via cyberspace

- 1) Hey, thanks! It's always much appreciated.
- 2) "Maybe," replies capricious Editor Mullins.
- 3) I could and will. The movie is called *Ponyo* on a Cliff, and should be released this July. It's about a goldfish princess named *Ponyo* who meet a five-year-old boy named *Sosuke* and wants to become human. It's supposed to have a watercolor-painting kind of look to it.

ON NARUTARDERY, PART I

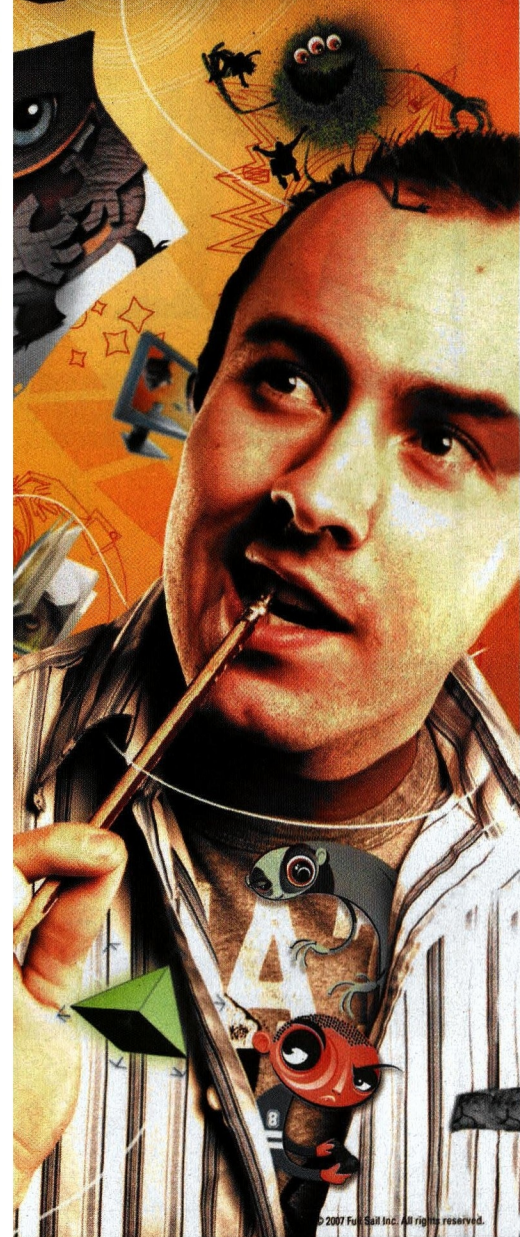
In issue 54 of *A.I.*, there was a dude named Quig MacGuffin who said that he had some "Narutards" in his school.

I just wanted to clarify that not all *Naruto* fans that wear headbands, give each other nicknames relating to anime (for example, my nickname is Misa from *Death Note*) and cosplay in school on Fridays because we have Anime Club are retarded nerds.

Yes, we may SEEM nerdy to those who do not love anime (which you said you do, Quig), but we're really not. I know nerdy. Nerdy is the boy in Anime Club that even annoys us.

Besides, even if we are nerdy, don't let

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We put 'em on the fridge later



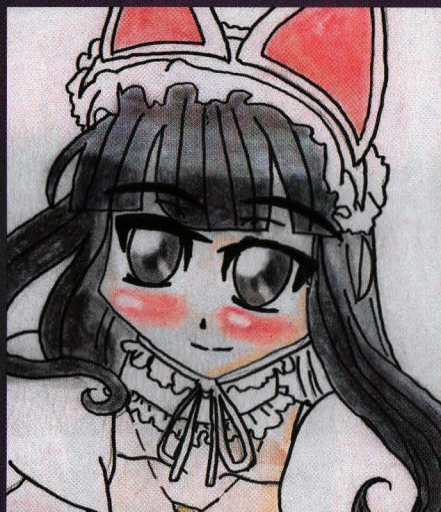
LINA AND GOURRY from SLAYERS

Shantal Hopkins, Franklin, NH



VASH from TRIGUN

Alfredo Luna, Santa Ana, CA



HAZUKI from TSUKUYOMI MOONPHASE

Lisa Smith, Perth, Australia



TAMAKI from OURAN HIGH SCHOOL HOST CLUB

Lori Talamanta, San Bernardino, CA



FRANCOISE from 009-1

Mariah Hartman, Hunlock Creek, PA



ANKO AND KURENAI from NARUTO

Abner Ravela, Baldwin Park, CA

us annoy you into not liking anime. Some of us are indeed *Naruto* retards. Some of us (like me) are not.

Lauren C.
Via cyberspace

Lauren, I have some terrible news for you. If you wear a *Naruto* headband, dress in *Naruto* cosplay at school and have an anime nickname, you are a nerd. You are a huge, huge nerd. I can absolutely promise you that, because I'm a huge nerd myself, and I do none of those nerdy things, so you're clearly nerdier than I am.

If you want to dress up in cosplay at school on a regular school day, you have my blessing. But please don't think that it's not nerdy. Also, please recognize that it makes normal folks assume all anime fans are as crazy as you are (I know it's not fair, but it's true).

Again, I'm not telling you not to do it, but don't pretend you aren't a huge, huge nerd for doing it.

ZERO TIMES ANYTHING

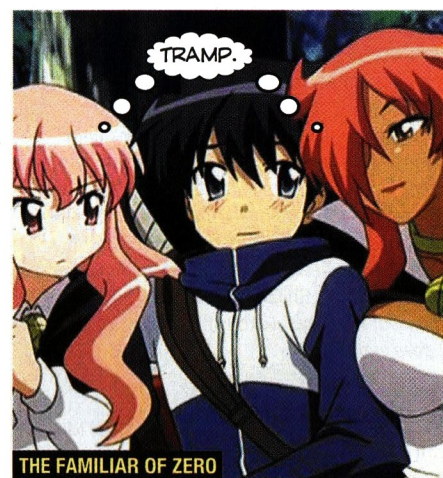
I have recently stumbled across reviews of *The Familiar of Zero*, a.k.a. *Zero no Tsukaima*, and I am in love with it already! I am extremely excited to hear it has been licensed by Geneon, and can't wait to watch it. Do you have any information about the release date or status of the anime?

Crystal Wettingfeld
Austin, TX

I do, Crystal! It's doomed.

DOOOOOOOOOOOOOMED.

Again, all the shows that Geneon has are in a mass of legal red tape. It's going to be hard—if not actually impossible—for another company to re-license any of Geneon's titles until the contracts expire, which will likely take years. And whenever that happens, it'll be shows like *Hellsing Ultimate* that get licensed first. *The Familiar of Zero* is waaaay down on the list.



ON NARUTARDERY, PART II

Dear Mr. Rob! Before I begin, I would like to make it clear that I do not consider myself a "Narutard," but simply a fan that feels that the manga and anime is being singled out by you (and several other writers) for excessive criticism. While some of this is justified, many

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of the crude remarks are beginning to cross the line of decency. I am also a fan of *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Inuyasha* and *Eureka Seven* just as much as *Naruto*. But this doesn't entitle me to talk down on series like *One Piece* and *Cowboy Bebop* simply because they are not among my own favorites. It is my belief that opinions should be respected if not exploited to broaden the genres and ideas for newer fans and followers. Quit playing favorites, it's not nice.

Thank you for your work and efforts, but please cut out the stabs at *Naruto*, or you'll find more than one shuriken in your head.

Lisa Sanborn
Union City, PA

My semi-apologies to Lisa and whatever Naruto fans I've enraged. I actually like Naruto. I do. I watch it every week on Toonami (well, until the filler arcs started). I can fully understand how someone would be as obsessed with Naruto as I am with One Piece. I have no problem with that. I would—and have—recommended it to many people.

What I have not recommended is that anyone dress in Naruto cosplay in public places that are not cons, that people take on names from Naruto or believe that Naruto is the greatest single creation of mankind. I think people should be allowed to do all these things if they want, but I do want them to recognize that it's really goofy to do so. I hope that clears it up.

ONE PIECE OF MY HEART

I noticed that you folks are very, VERY against people wanting to enjoy their favorite anime and manga online for free. But what about shows that are heavily edited by the companies that dub them, and are released at

a annoyingly slow rate? I'll use my favorite manga as an example: *One Piece*. In Japan, readers get a new chapter almost every week, while here in the U.S., we only get about two chapters a month. So far, viewers in America that watch OP legally are roughly 300 chapters behind. And what do they get for their patience? An awful amount of changes. For instance, *The Going Merry* becomes the *Merry Go*, Shichibukai are the Seven Warlords of the Sea, and poor, poor Zoro. So why blame us for wanting the truth? Just because we don't support soulless media overlords doesn't mean we don't support the stories that they're corrupting for money.

Kyler D. Weeks
Via cyberspace

I am a huge One Piece fan. I hated 4Kids' edited One Piece. But I do not download fansubs of One Piece, nor do I support the practice.

No one has the right to steal anime online, no matter the circumstances. Do I wish VIZ would release the One Piece manga faster? Heck yes. Does that give me the right to download illegal copies of the anime or manga? No way.

If you aren't paying for the series, you are not supporting the series. Your moral support does not put food on animators' tables. I like One Piece so much I refuse to steal from Eiichiro Oda. We One Piece fans are extremely lucky that FUNimation got the rights and will be releasing the uncut anime here. But even if they hadn't, that wouldn't give anyone the right to watch illegal fansubs.

And with that, I'm sounding the bell. And since I'm the ref, I declare me the winner! Yay! Something tells me I'm in for a rematch for some of these topics, however, despite me being so, so right. I say bring it on! And I'll see the rest of you in 30.

Rob Bricken

—Rob Bricken

Rob Bricken was getting hate mail before some of you were born. He loves it.

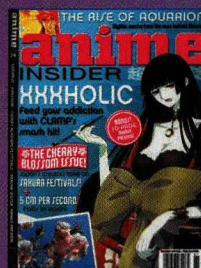
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BACKTALK



This xxxHolic cover was even better than the last one. How about another Tsubasa cover to keep it happy?

Jody Picker
Ogden, UT

So does this make me an xxxHolic-holic? Cool.

Lawrence Robles
Via cyberspace

Those cherry blossom pictures were beautiful! Is there any chance you're going to put them up on your website as wallpapers? Please? Pretty please?

Meaghan Stephanso
Albuquerque, NM

Even after reading your article twice, I have no idea of the difference between *Aquarion* and *RahXephon*. I blame the anime, not you, though.

Jim Bedner
Via cyberspace

I'll watch *Aquarion*, but I better not see any preachy environmentalist stuff about planting trees and recycling microwaves, like I saw in Shoji Kawamori's other recent series, *Arjuna*. Also, why don't they make more anime series where a reckless hotheaded girl gets to be the main robot pilot?

Erin Yamagata
Agoura Hills, CA

Beck vs. Bad Luck was an awesome idea for "Last Man Standing!" But even as a squealing yaoi fangirl, I think Beck should have won.

Misha Reid-Hines
Via cyberspace

Thanks for giving *Tweeny Witches* the "Must See DVD" of the month. It's one of my favorites and one that everybody should see.

Carl Penner
Ann Arbor, MI

Why don't you have another "Last Man Standing" with Golgo 13? Oh, that's right. It's because no one can beat him and there'd be no suspense.

Scott Reinhardt
Centerville, OK

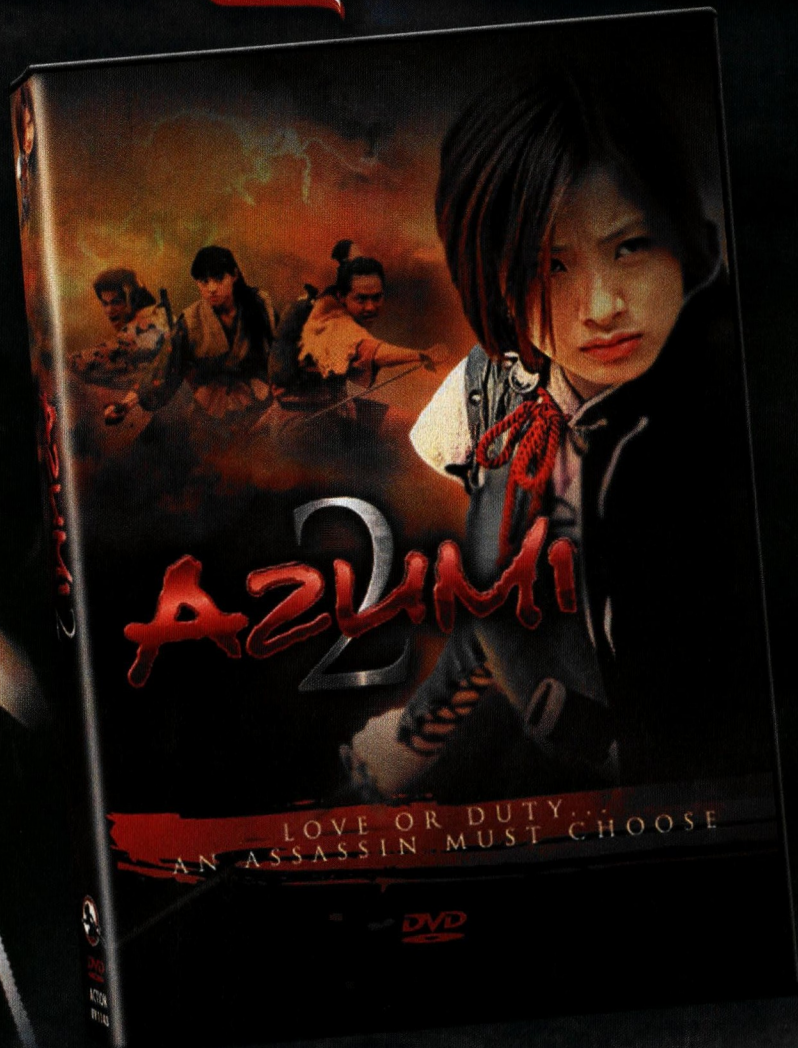
Thanks, Rob for having so much patience with us "Narutards." I know how annoying we can be sometimes.

Rebecca Giansante
Via cyberspace

Love our features? Hate our features? Tell us all about it at anime-insider@wizardent.com. We reserve the right to call you MacGuffin if you don't include your real name. Don't say we didn't warn you.

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VIVA LA REVOLTECH

Kaiyodo's Revoltech line keeps redefining what makes anime toys

For a long time, action figures in Japan played second fiddle to pricey fixed-pose, painted statues in the hearts and minds of hardcore anime fans. Japanese action figures, while fun, were often the domain of cheaper children's toys, while fan-oriented collectibles were pretty but stiflingly static. These past few years, however, a new Japanese toy line has been making waves in the collectible action figure market worldwide—a figure series collectively known as Revoltech.

JOINTS OF THE FUTURE

Revoltech is the brainchild of the Osaka-based toy company Kaiyodo, known as producers of high-quality collectible figures, plastic models and garage kits for quite some time. The Revoltech line, however, kicked off something unique with the development of a new ball-joint system. Ball joints have been popular as movement devices on large-scale dolls and other poseable toys for several years now; however, Kaiyodo felt standard ball joints still lacked the flexibility needed to

create truly dynamic poses. They developed a special ratcheted ball joint with two pegs to allow a wider movement range. The two pegs fit into holes on the figure's limbs or torso, and the ball shape allows the joint to rotate 360 degrees. The ratchet notches within joints are included to ensure that figures can hold their poses, and also to give the manipulator a satisfying "click" when moving things.

The first few Revoltech issues in mid-2006 included a bunch of robot characters: Getter Robo, Dougram, and some Evangelion units, as well as a token humanoid: Dante from *Devil May Cry*. These issues showed the collecting public just how incredibly versatile the Revoltech joint system could be, even if the figures were smaller than comparable model kits. Revoltech releases have continued on a steady schedule since then, with two or more figures coming out on the 15th of each month in Japan. At a MSRP of between 2000 and 2500 yen per figure, they're also highly affordable in an increasingly pricey toy collector market, and the North American distributor of Revoltech toys, Organic Hobby, usually releases them a month or two after their Japanese sale date at a similar price point.

MECHA FOR THE MASSES

Thus far, the overwhelming majority of figures in the Revoltech line have been robots.

Whether of the fantasy-developed Super Robot variety (*Getter Robo*, *Gaiking*, *Gigantor*), more technologically feasible robots (*Patlabor*, *Macross*), or somewhere in between (*Evangelion*, *Transformers*), Revoltech's managed to assimilate them all into detailed miniature figures. While functionality has sometimes been sacrificed for the sake of the series' trademark poseability (the Transformers, for example, no longer transform into vehicles), the fan reaction to these toys has been nothing short of overwhelmingly positive. Kaiyodo responded by releasing variations and expansion sets of various robot figures, some of which are limited editions available only at special events, such as the twice-yearly Wonder Festival.

The most recent Wonder Festival brought news of even more mecha madness headed our way later this year. Among the upcoming offerings are super-robot Gurren Lagann



FIGURE THE POWER Revoltech made its name with robot toys, and continues with figures of *Gurren Lagann*'s title mecha, in all its weird forms.

SILENT TYPE

Insane kendo killer was quiet, polite, says witness
Page 22

APATHY-BOT

New A.I. becomes sentient, doesn't care
Page 82

and several new Valkyries from the original *Macross* TV series and *Macross Plus*. In addition, a batch of EVA-themed "Mini Revoltechs" has hit the market to capitalize on the *Evangelion 1.0* theatrical feature. The newest mecha-minded lineup is the upcoming Revoltech Assemble Borg series: brightly colored figures that boast original designs, a host of accessories, and a notable amount of inspiration gleaned from the famous Microman toy series (see sidebar).

HUMAN NATURE

But Revoltech isn't just about plastic incarnations of massive metal monstrosities. Lovingly sculpted renditions of human characters are also prominently featured. Besides the previously mentioned Dante from the original Revoltech line-up, the psychotic, gun-toting Revy from *Black Lagoon* was given a ball-jointed figure perfect for posing in all sorts of action shots.

However, the main Revoltech line, sculpted by Katsuhisa Yamaguchi, has mostly been moving away from humans as of late, perhaps because it's harder to hide their ball joints. Fans have nothing to fear, however, as Kaiyodo established a separate line for different types of humanoid(ish) Revoltech figures. Among these is the 2G line, headed up by ace sculptor Enoki Tomohide. Thus far, the 2G line has seen issues of two variations of *Fate/Stay Night*'s Saber (regular and Saber Alter versions), an impeccably adorable and accessory-laden version of Yotsuba Koiwai from the hit manga *Yotsubato!* (with another accessory set planned), and Yotsuba's makeshift robot pal, Danboard. These figures tend to come with interesting extras: huge swords for Saber, multiple faces and items for Yotsuba, and even working, light-up eyes for the mighty Danboard.

And that's just the beginning. Another Revoltech line devoted completely to female figures has sprung up. This set, called Revoltech Fräulein, is also headed up by Tomohide's sculpting expertise. The actual joints on the Fräulein figures are designed to be as inconspicuous as possible. While they're still visible, they don't stick out like a sore thumb like they typically do on most action figures. Releases thus far have included Rei and Asuka from *Evangelion* decked out in plugsuits, along-

side Rin Tohsaka from *Fate/Stay Night*. A few upcoming lines were shown at Wonder Festival: Haruka and Ami from the hit singer-managing game *Idolm@ster*, and an original warrior girl named Poccho designed by fantasy illustrator Shunya Yamashita.

And that's just the beginning—announcements from the Kaiyodo camp have revealed a special *Fist of the North Star* Revoltech series in planning (no word if exploded-head accessories are included). There's also a set of Street Fighter Revoltechs to coincide with the launch of *Street Fighter IV* and the Japan-only *Street Fighter Online: Mouse Generation* PC game. Even *Detroit Metal City*, the successful manga about a gaudy death-metal star's double life, is getting its own Revoltech line.

Kaiyodo is clearly showing no signs of slowing down, and with plenty of awesome new additions to the Revoltech sets still waiting in the wings, this is one figure series that's bound to see a lot of action for years to come.

■ Heidi Kempes



REVOLTECH FRÄULEIN'S REI AYANAMI

FIGUREEMPIRE

How other leading toy series are faring

Revoltech's not the only game in town when it comes to high-quality, distinctive Japanese toy lines. Other companies have their own established styles that cater to different tastes: customization fans, designer toy collectors, articulation fiends or even just the devotees of cute.



PINKY:ST

Gunze Sangyo's super-deformed miniature dolls with interchangeable parts are popular worldwide. Official Pinky dolls based on *Haruhi Suzumiya*, *Evangelion* (above) and more have been issued, but fans have made customs based on all kinds of sources.

KUBRICKS

Inspired by boxy Lego figurines, Medicom's Kubricks take the simple aesthetic to a new level of cool. Kubricks cover media ranging from anime to pop art. Ever seen a cubist figure of Andy Warhol?

MICROMAN

Takara's tiny but super-poseable action figures have been popular in Japan for decades. *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* director Masahiro Sakurai even used Microman toys to tell the game's animators what the characters' various moves should look like.

NENDOROIDS

Good Smile Company's line of Nendoroid figures are ultra-chibified. Figures include a variety of faces and accessories and come in two sizes: the larger standard Nendoroids, and the trading-figure Nendoroid Petites.

FIGMAS

Max Factory recently jumped on the hyper-poseable figure bandwagon with the Figma series. Thus far, all the Fignas released are humanoid, and come from *Code Geass*, *Fate/Stay Night* and more. ■ HK

THE RIDE THAT BITES BACK

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what moves you

COMING SOON

The latest anime and manga license announcements



CLAYMORE'S CLARE

BANDAI VISUAL

Sola, a 15-episode series from the writer of *Kanon*, joins Bandai Visual's lineup. Consisting of a 13-episode TV series and two OVA episodes, *Sola* follows amateur astronomer Yorito Moriyama's relationship with a girl who's connected to a race of ancient, grudge-holding beings. No release date has been set.

DMP

Digital Manga Publishing announced the rights to Tow Ubukata's *Fafner* novel, available in North America on July 8. Ubukata, the novelist behind *Le Chevalier D'Eon*, *Pilgrim Jäger* and *Heroic Age*, wrote the *Fafner* mecha anime's second half. DMP also licensed the shonen action series *Knights*, by *Burst Angel* manga artist Minoru Murao. The first volume arrives on July 22.

FUNIMATION

The grim swords-and-sorcery series *Claymore* became FUNimation's first new license of 2008.

Based on the manga by Norihiro Yagi, the 26-episode TV series explores a medieval fantasy world where half-demon women called Claymores hunt unnatural creatures, with one particular hunter going against the Claymore collective's tenets.

RIGHT STUF

Nozomi Entertainment and Right Stuf landed the schoolgirl drama *Maria Watches Over Us*.

Known as *Maria-sama ga Miteru* in Japan, the series currently spans three seasons and 31 episodes, with a fourth season set to premiere later this year on Japanese TV. The series focuses on the possibly-not-platonic affections between students at the Lillian Girls' Academy, where newly enrolled Yumi is rapidly inducted into the student body's upper echelons. The first season arrives in a boxset this summer.

■ Todd Ciolek

SOLA'S MATSURI

VERSUS VEXILLE

The latest CGI anime film squares off against 'Appleseed Ex Machina'

Vexille doesn't want to be *Appleseed Ex Machina*. It wants to be *better* than *Appleseed Ex Machina*. Set in a world where a technologically overrun Japan isolates itself in 2067, *Vexille* shares a lot of common ground with *Ex Machina*'s computer-rendered vision of the future and predilection for wildly implausible action and a loose grasp of science. *Vexille*'s shipping on May 20, so now's the time for it to face down its competition. ■ TC

VEXILLE

APPLESEED: EX MACHINA

THE EFFICIENT, ODDLY NAMED FEMALE LEAD

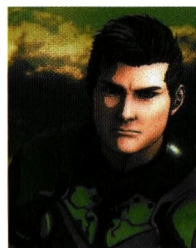
Vexille, a straight-laced member of the American military unit known as Sword, survives an ill-fated attempt to infiltrate Japan and spy on the all-governing Daiwa corporation.

Deunan Knute, a loose-cannon member of the ES.W.A.T. police force, deals with terrorism in the too-perfect future city of Olympus.

ADVANTAGE: *EX MACHINA*. Deunan has a sense of humor.

THE BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

Separated from Leon (right), her squad leader and boyfriend, Vexille falls in with an underground resistance led by Maria, who had a fling with Leon before Japan expelled all foreigners.



Briareos, Deunan's bunny-eared cyborg boyfriend, is injured in combat, and her new partner, Tereus, is a clone resembling pre-cyborg Briareos.

ADVANTAGE: *EX MACHINA*. Briareos is cuter.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

Meditations on Japan's insularity and amoral technological pursuits are thrust aside in favor of mad scientists.



Meditations on the humanity of cyborgs and clones are thrust aside in favor of Deunan and Briareos getting into firefights (left).

ADVANTAGE: *VEXILLE*. Action anime that criticizes Japan? We're shocked.

THE INSANE VILLAIN

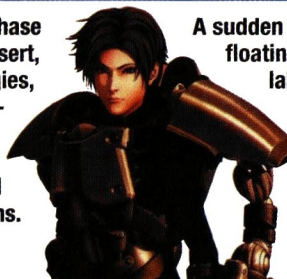
Kisaragi, the architect of Japan's corporate-controlled seclusion, wants to "evolve" everyone into mindless drones.

The remnants of a misguided scientific team conspire to turn humans, clones and cyborgs into murderous drones.

ADVANTAGE: *EX MACHINA*. At least rioting zombies are fun to watch.

THE MOST RIDICULOUS ACTION SCENE

A high-speed chase through a desert, featuring dune buggies, hovercrafts, powered armor (right) and enormous scrap-metal sandworms.



A sudden assault on a floating, cube-shaped laboratory where Deunan, Briareos and Tereus take on swarms of robots.

ADVANTAGE: *VEXILLE*. *Dune* references beat mecha gunplay.



MATERIA GOODS (L to R) Kadaj, Yuffie and Reno are only the second wave of Square Enix's *Advent Children* line.

FIGURE FANTASY

Inside the Square Enix merchandise machine

If you need proof of *Final Fantasy*'s popularity, look no further than its toy lines. Ten years ago, *Final Fantasy* action figures were a novelty. Today, merchandise based on *Final Fantasy* games and other popular Square Enix lines is practically a world unto itself. At New York's 2008 Toy Fair, we sat down with Square Enix senior sales manager Kanji Romeo Tashiro and product development and overseas planning section chief Miyako Kibe, who let us in on the tricks of the Square Enix toy trade. ■ *TC*

ANIME INSIDER: *How do you decide which games and characters become toys?*

TASHIRO: We try to time the merchandise with the game's release, but we also listen to the fans and take their requests into account.

Do U.S. fans differ from Japanese fans in terms of favorite characters? What are your most successful figures?

TASHIRO: Character-wise, Sephiroth and Cloud are pretty much universally popular. As a general trend, I've seen that the female characters are more popular in Japan, but in the States, the more masculine characters, like Judge Gabranth, are popular.

KIBE: The Cloud and Fenrir bike set from *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* has been our most successful release. In Japan, it was available only as a limited edition that came with a DVD boxset, but in America it was available at retail, and it sold very well.

How do you decide what toys to bring to America and which to leave in Japan?

TASHIRO: We like to bring over whatever we can. For example, there are some Pixar and Disney products in the *Kingdom Hearts* line that we can't bring out because of licensing restrictions.

Why are some figures, like Balthier from the *Final Fantasy Tactics* set, not included in U.S. releases?

TASHIRO: It has to do with the blind-box way we sell them over in Japan. For the Japanese fans, it was supposed to capture the fun of collecting, but that's not the style in the U.S., where we sell the fully completed figure in a box where you can see the content. Since the style is different, we thought "Is it really fair to the Japanese fans?" In situations like that, sacrifices have to be made, so we said, "Sorry, Balthier," and took him out.

Any plans to make toys for older cult-favorite Square games, like *Chrono Trigger* or *Vagrant Story*?

TASHIRO: There's no plans for any of those titles, but if fans wanted it, we'd definitely consider it.

When you were a kid, what was your favorite toy?

KIBE: I liked Rika-chan, which is pretty much the Japanese version of Barbie.

TASHIRO: I loved my Great Mazinger toy with launching fists. I'd shoot the arms off so much I'd lose them, so then I'd go steal my brother's, and he'd take them back later.

TOP FIVE

1 CODE GEASS

We may raise an eyebrow at the xenophobic premise of *Code Geass*, but there's no denying that ever-reliable director Goro Taniguchi's made a compelling alternate world where Westerners conquered Japan with robots. The series does a fine job of drawing us into the one-man revolution of its lead, Lelouch, who is neither a full-blown sociopath nor a goody-goody, for a change.

2 PHOENIX WRIGHT

We don't know if we care for this young whippersnapper named Apollo Justice, but there's still no matching the *Phoenix Wright* games when it comes to fast-paced courtroom drama and hilarious, clearly intentional innuendo. The latest installment even puts the DS stylus to better use, which almost makes up for the lack of Miles Edgeworth.



3 MONSTER

Naoki Urasawa's thriller is heading into its home stretch this month, and the psychological battle between Doctor Tenma and Johan is one of the most fascinating showdowns we're likely to see in manga this year. We're still hoping that VIZ Media finds a way to bring the *Monster* anime to us.

4 MYSTERY DUNGEON: SHIREN THE WANDERER

We were ready to hate *Shiren* when we heard that the game sends you back to its start if you die, but this little dungeon hack is strangely captivating in its mean-spirited challenges. It's a fun change from all-too-forgiving RPGs, and nagging our DS-linked friends to save us when we're captured only brings us closer together.

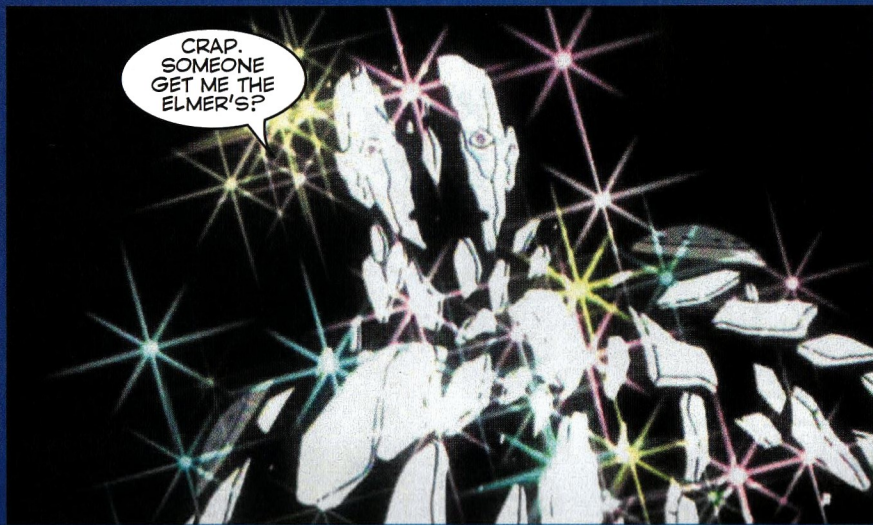
5 INDIANA JONES GOODIES

No one does weird merchandise quite like Japan, so it's not surprising that there's a bevy of collectible trinkets for the latest Indiana Jones movie. Some are basic, but there's also a line of huge-headed Indiana Jones characters (including Sean Connery) and a light-up crystal skull that soothes us to sleep with its misshapen alien glow. ■ The A.I. Staff

DEATH OF THE MONTH

Kitsunebi, 'Ninja Scroll: The Series'

The *Ninja Scroll* TV series is a rapid-fire serving of sudden deaths, and few are more deserved than Kitsunebi's. A translucent crystalline creature of the Kimon clan, he's part of a multi-ninja effort to capture the Dragon Stone, a magical MacGuffin transported by legendary samurai Jubei Kibagami. Kitsunebi's method of nabbing the precious rock involves kidnapping and forcing unpleasant attentions on Azami, a tree-like woman who's stolen half the stone. Yet Azami escapes him, and Jubei shows up to take back the stone from Kitsunebi. While the see-thru ninja unleashes deadly swarms of insects, Jubei calmly slices him in half, proving that ninja-hood isn't the best career choice when you're made out of crystal... ■ TC



OTAKU SPOTTING

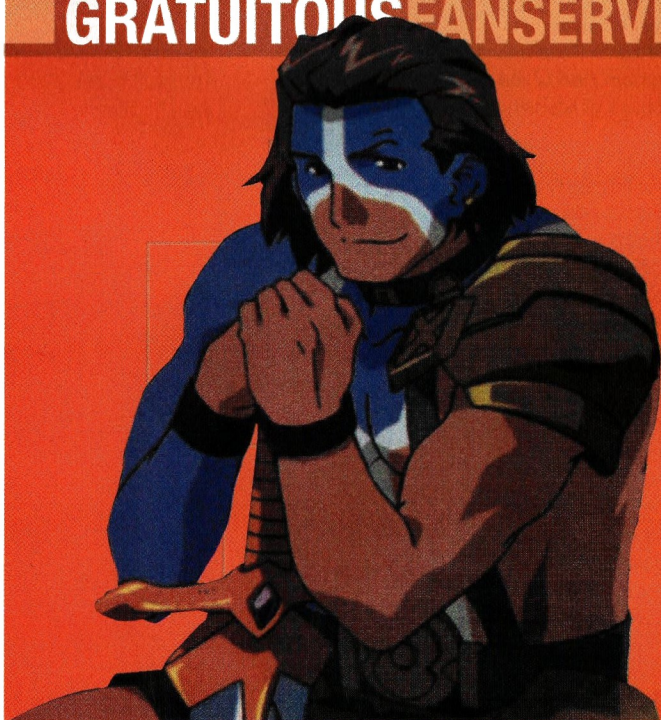
New nerd café caters to the rail-riders of Japan

There's a new Akihabara café designed for geeks, but the waitresses aren't posing as maids, cat-girls or anything quite so demeaning. Instead, they're train conductors.

The Tetsudou Izakaya Little TGV opened its doors this past February, featuring uniformed staff, dish names and décor entirely reminiscent of Japanese train lines. But this train-freak café has deeper roots than the maid-café scene. The roots of train fans goes back further than unhealthy otaku culture, and Akihabara is an unexpected site for a café targeting a different (and perhaps more socially accepted) clientele. Will anime fans flock to the new restaurant? If *Train Man* is any indication, the two groups may share more than they realize. ■ TC

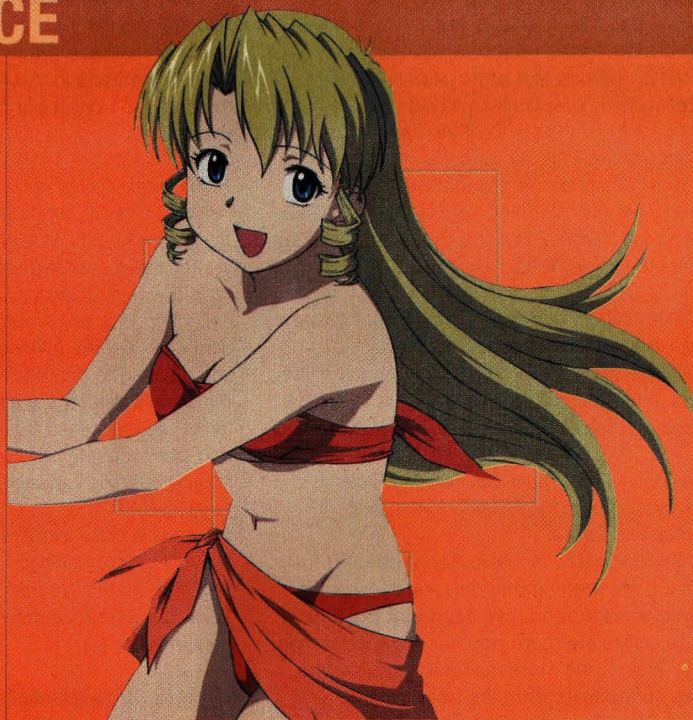


GRATUITOUS FAN SERVICE



■ BEAR (.hack//SIGN)

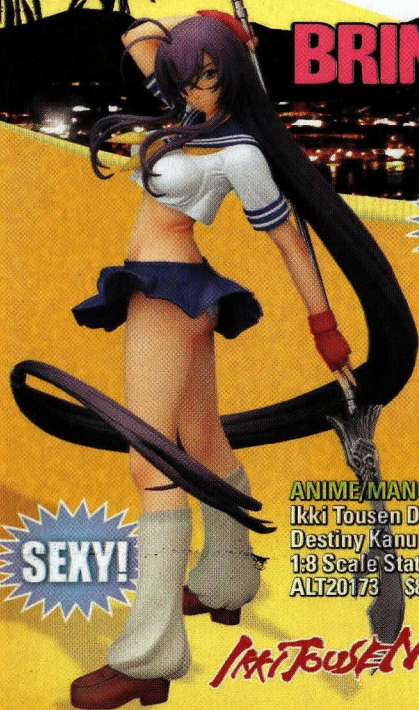
Most of the characters in *.hack//SIGN*'s The World online game actually resemble their real-life players. Bear, for instance, is a steadfast, burly, middle-aged warrior in the game and a middle-aged novelist with a bratty son in the physical world. His online-RPG incarnation has a weightlifter's body and doesn't smoke, so it sneaks by the real him.



■ PACIFICA (Scrapped Princess)

Pacifica represents the dichotomy of an innocent, friendly girl who's predicted by prophecy to doom the entire world, thus raising the question of whether it's worth killing a curly-haired blonde just to preserve a medieval-fantasy setting. We say it isn't, because Pacifica looks nice in a bikini.

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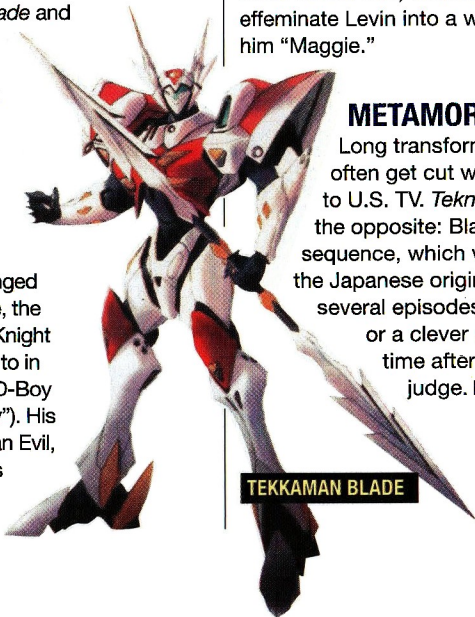
TEKNOBABBLE

The possibly shameful past of 'Teknoman'

Teknoman may have been a blip on TV radar in the mid-'90s, but it had a history. Aired in America on UPN with little fanfare at the time, *Teknoman* is actually the Japanese *Tekkaman Blade* TV anime with alterations—some small, some drastic. Fortunately, Media Blasters is offering both *Tekkaman Blade* and a *Teknoman* boxset this month for fans to enjoy. But what's different between the two shows?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A few of *Tekkaman Blade*'s more ridiculous-sounding names are changed for the English dub. Blade, the key warrior in the Space Knight group, was often referred to in the Japanese version as D-Boy (meaning "dangerous boy"). His rival was named Tekkaman Evil, changed to the much less blatant Teknoman Sabre for U.S. viewers.



TEKKAMAN BLADE

SEX CHANGE

In *Tekkaman Blade*, Levin is a rather flamboyant member of the Space Knights. He has an interest in Blade—actually, more like an infatuation. Much like Zoicite in the *Sailor Moon* dub, *Teknoman* turned the effeminate Levin into a woman and renamed him "Maggie."

METAMORPHOSIS

Long transformation sequences often get cut when anime comes to U.S. TV. *Teknoman*, however, did the opposite: Blade's transformation sequence, which was seldom shown in the Japanese original, was inserted into several episodes. Fodder for fans, or a clever way to pad running time after cuts? You be the judge. ■ HK

BY THE NUMBERS

5,000 Dollars offered for first place in the Third Morning International Manga Competition

51 Episodes in the *Blue Dragon* TV series airing on Cartoon Network

43 Episodes in the 1989 *Dragon Quest* TV series, briefly aired on American networks until a lawsuit from Akira Toriyama got it pulled

44 Blind-packaged posters for sale in a recent Akihabara 48 promotion, canceled after fans complained about having to collect them all to attend a special concert

25 Minimum age for waitresses at *Mother*, a new maternally oriented otaku café in Osaka

3 Chapters of *Kare to Kanojo no Kyokaisen* (His and Her Boundaries) completed before its author, Yorishiro Tomoyuki, died this past March

1 Convention, NeoNohCon in Buffalo, NY, canceled due to a snowstorm

■ The A.I. Staff



CENTRAL STAGE

Halcali has American debut at Anime Central

They're talented, they're cute, they're barely out of junior high and they're going to perform at Chicago's Anime Central. J-pop and light hip-hop duo Halcali (named after their two members, Halca and Yucali) met at dancing school and are now topping the Oricon charts.

Fame has come quickly for the two young vocalists. In 2002 they won Oshare Track Factory's "Female Rapper Audition" and by the next year their very first single, "Tandem" was released. This was swiftly followed by the single "Electric Sensei," letting everyone know just how supercharged teachers are. Their album, titled *Halcali Bacon*, came out in September of the same year and hit number 5 on the charts.

With 2004 came their second album, and then the girls signed up with Epic Records Japan. Anime companies caught wind of this promising new duo, and Halcali did theme songs for *Eureka Seven* and the yet-to-be-licensed *Getsumen to Heiki Mina*. Their latest



COLOR EXPLOSION The two members of Halcali mesh rap and pop as fearlessly as they combine different hues.

album, *Cyborg Oretachi*, hit stores last summer, and Halca and Yucali have been touring Japan and making stops in Europe. Anime Central, however, marks their U.S. debut.

Other guests at Anime Central will include actors Vic Mignogna (Fay in *Tsubasa*) and Hannah Alcorn (Sunako in *The Wallflower*) as well as producer Steve Yun (*Robotech: The Shadow Chronicles*). The convention takes place from May 16 to 18 and more information on the Halcali performance can be found at www.acen.org. ■ Danica Davidson

COSPLAYTIME

Cutey Honey from 'Re: Cutey Honey'

by Ashley Schoeller

It's important for today's fans to respect the classics, even if it's just through remakes like Gainax's *Re: Cutey Honey*. The new series and its redesign of anime icon Cutey Honey caught the eye of Ashley Schoeller from Orlando, Fla., who recreated the heroine's costume for last year's Anime Central. Made from red leather and black vinyl (plus yellow suede gloves), Ashley's costume "took quite a bit of hand sewing," especially when it came to stitching on the heart accents and making the smaller ones from Sculpey. The hair, however, is all Ashley's, thanks to some special dye. If you have a cosplay tribute new or old, send your photos and story to:



COSPLAYTIME, c/o Anime Insider, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY, 10920 or email 'em (hi-res, please) to anime-insider@wizardent.com. If your entry runs in Anime Insider, you'll get a prize!

CONJOB

JACON

May 16-18, Orlando, FL

For its nine-year anniversary, JACON has a wide array of panels, competitions, events and more. Guests include Spike Spencer (Akito in *Martian Successor Nadesico*), Gregg Berger (Jecht in *Final Fantasy X*). www.jacon.org

DELTA H CON

May 16-18, Houston, TX

This gaming-and-anime con mixes it up with attractions from both worlds, including special programming for kids. Voice actor and director Jamie McGonnigal (Johnny in *Shadow Hearts: From the New World*) leads the guest roster. www.deltahcon.com

OTAFEST

May 16-18, Calgary, AB

This 10-year-old Canadian con offers anime chess, anime improv, a gothic lolita fashion show, and exhibitions of swords and taiko drumming. www.otafest.com

ANIMAZEMENT

May 23-25, Durham, NC

Another con turning 10 this year, Animazement boasts an extensive guest list, featuring actors Akira Kamiya (Roy in *Macross*), Kumiko Watanabe (Shippo in *Inuyasha*) and more, plus animator Koichi Tsunoda (*Galaxy Express 999*) and Toei producer Yasuo Yamaguchi (*Candy Candy*). www.animazement.org

FANIMECON

May 23-26, San Jose, CA

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5 reasons you'll love **HONEY AND CLOVER**

BY MEGHAN GRANT

The poet Emily Dickinson once wrote that all it takes to make an entire prairie is a bee, a clover and spirited willpower. But such a goal isn't on Yuta Takemoto's mind. Played by Sho Sakurai of j-pop band Arashi, Yuta's just an average art college student who loves making models, holds a part-time job at the local grocery store and hasn't the slightest idea what he wants for his future. A splash of color brightens Takemoto's world while he's attending a party at his professor's house, where he meets Hagumi, a young and beautiful genius painter. After they go to lunch together, the shy girl begins to warm up to the sincere

2. IT'S AN ANIME-INFUSED PRODUCTION

Live-action looks a lot different from stylized anime, but *Honey and Clover* contains a number of names and voices fans are sure to be familiar with. Having worked previously as a storyboarder, unit and episode director on *Gundam Seed* and *Gundam Seed Destiny*, director Masahiro Takada leads an anime-experienced cast, including Yusuke Iseya (*Casshern*) as Morita and Yuu Aoi (*Tekkonkinkreet*) as Hagumi. Together, they change the form of the story without changing its spirit.

3. IT'S ARTISTIC IN BOTH SIGHT AND SOUND

Since the main characters are a bunch of artists with varying specialties, it only makes sense that *Honey and Clover* is visually compelling; Hagumi's abstract paintings especially have the power to inspire and captivate—and so does this film's soundtrack.

Original manga creator Chika Umino was inspired by her favorite albums, and the film adaptation incorporates those influential sounds with songs by Japanese artists Spitz, Suga Shikao and even Sakurai's boy band Arashi, with a score by the ever-amazing Yoko Kanno (*Cowboy Bebop*).

4. IT KNOWS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE YOUNG

Coming-of-age stories can be emotionally tiring, but carefree college students are a lot of fun. The guys' colorful apartment complex hosts a swingin' barbecue, which gets even the stodgy Mayama out of his room. Living for the moment before having to accept the responsibilities of the "real world," Morita suggests jumping into a beat-up station wagon for a trip to the beach on a whim. *Honey*

and *Clover* captures that precarious moment between childhood and adulthood, as special as it is fleeting.

5. THE CHARACTERS GROW UP REALISTICALLY

People don't turn into grownups by simply reaching a certain age; it takes a spark of motivation to become a mature adult. Formerly a sixth-year student who often disappears for weeks on end, Morita attempts to become a professional by holding a gallery exhibition; reluctantly accepting sculpture as a business forces the unfocused young man to examine exactly why he makes art, a conclusion he reaches with Hagumi's help.

Worried by Hagumi's isolation and artistic slump, Takemoto also tries to run from his uncertainties, only to discover what he really wants to do with his life. And all along, the friends and classmates must face the possibility that unrequited love can stay that way, and decide what it means to them and what they'll do next. Like a field of clovers, growing up takes time, and a little help from others.



Freelancer Meghan Grant is always ready to skip work for a random weekday trip to the beach.



BOY MEETS GIRL But that's just part of a story driven by tangled emotions and the confusion of growing up.

Takemoto. But he soon finds a rival in his neighbor Morita, an oddball but talented senior student who is taken with Hagumi's unique artwork—and they're only three of the complex characters in this slice-of-life story.

This live-action film adaptation is taken from Chika Umino's hit shojo manga, which is part of VIZ Media's *Shojo Beat* anthology and was also adapted into an anime series and a live-action TV show. Here are five reasons to get caught up in the sweetness of *Honey and Clover* when VIZ delivers it on May 13.

1. THERE'S A MIXED LOVE STORY

Like the title itself, the romance of *Honey and Clover* tastes both sweet and bitter. Mayama is an up-and-coming designer with an obsessive infatuation towards one of his coworkers, to the immense sadness of Ayumi, a gifted ceramics expert who secretly loves him. Despite all the hits their relationship takes, they struggle to retain the friendship that means so much to both of them.

After falling for Hagumi, Takemoto goes about his day with a goofy grin on his face until his idealism is crushed when he notices Morita's hand-carved trinket on her bag. The question of "will they or won't they?" is less important here than the emotional growth the characters achieve.



SWEET AS HONEY Hagumi is a painting prodigy—it's the rest of her life she's still figuring out.

flashinjapan 井の中の蛙大海を知らず

why overseas
otaku dig

BY ANDREZ BERGEN

BAMBOO BLADE

Japanese culture has its share of potentially deadly arts: karate, judo, aikido, jujitsu and, if you're willing to pick up a bow and arrow, kyudo. Then there's the discipline known as "the way of the sword." It's essentially Japanese fencing, even though there's no actual katana blade involved. You can call it kendo.

assembled and ready for action, the resulting combination of kendo matches and humor takes the show into underdog territory.

"I think the humorous, day-to-day high-school life contrasts well with the tension-filled scenes of kendo combat," says director Hisashi Saito, who previously worked as an episode director for *Gun Sword*.

It's no surprise that the writer behind *Gun Sword*—*Read or Die* creator Hideyuki Kurata—is scripting the action for this femme-fatale take on kendo, along with the high-school drama, action and comedy that pervade it.

While Japan-born exports like sushi, sumo wrestling, samurai, ninja and anime have drifted into Western circles, kendo's profile has been relatively low-key until now.

"You might think this strange, but up until now there have been few animation titles about kendo," Saito adds. "So, when this title came up, I felt it challenging and attractive to be able to depict kendo in the better light it deserves."

Nor does it hurt that the director himself is a fan of the sport.

"I have experience with kendo myself, so I'm making use of that in the production," Saito admits. He also sees the series' potential to cross over from hardcore anime fans to kids, teens, women and the occasional kendo practitioner.

Based on the manga by writer Masahiro Totsuka and illustrator Aguri Igarashi that hit shelves inside *Young Gangan* magazine in 2004, the anime sticks fairly close to its source, steadily developing the ragtag kendo team's quest for glory and free food.

But with five essential girl members on that team, Saito obviously can't help but root for one in particular. "I like Tamaki," he confesses. "She's unpredictable. She's small and quiet, but she's strong in kendo—and she likes anime!"

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FACE OF FURY A killing rage may help in the heat of battle (above), but the girls of *Bamboo Blade* (opposite page) don't look all that savage outside of the kendo circuit.

Derived from sword-fighting techniques at least 800 years ago, kendo involves two imposingly armored duelists who lay waste to one another with bamboo swords called "shinai." It's an incredibly popular sport in Japan, and most boys there take on the kendo challenge from junior high school through to college.

This makes the new series from anime production house AIC ASTA partly a surprise, and partly an obvious choice—for while *Bamboo Blade* follows the travails of a high school kendo team, the members are all *girls*. Not shockingly, it's from the producers of *Gun Sword*, a series in which the female cast members also pretty much stole the show.

Bamboo Blade follows under-motivated, penniless high school teacher Toraji "Kojiro" Ishida, whose career and personal life change direction after he puts together a supposed "dream team" of kendo girls. The roster includes Tamaki Kawazoe, daughter of a kendo school family and a prodigy who's virtually unbeatable in the sport, but is more interested in cartoons; the easygoing Kirino Chiba, captain of the club and nursemaid to the others; and closet problem student (not to mention occasional sadist) Miyako Miyazaki. Their group is rounded out by aspiring novelist Sayako Kuwahara and the hilariously clumsy Satori Azuma.

While Ishida's chief motivation is definitely the year's worth of free meals he'll win from a buddy if he can make the girls successful, the girls' own motivations are anything but unified. Once the team is

Tokyo Correspondent Andrez Bergen tried kendo once, but he ended up in the penalty box after biting someone.

■ AT A GLANCE

AIRING: Weekly on TV Tokyo, AT-X, TV Aichi and TV Osaka

DIRECTOR: Hisashi Saito (episode director on *Gun Sword*, animation director on *Planetes*)

SERIES COMPOSITION: Hideyuki Kurata (*Gun Sword*, *Now and Then, Here and There*)

CHARACTER DESIGN: Yukichi Namiyanagi (*Jinki:Extend*)

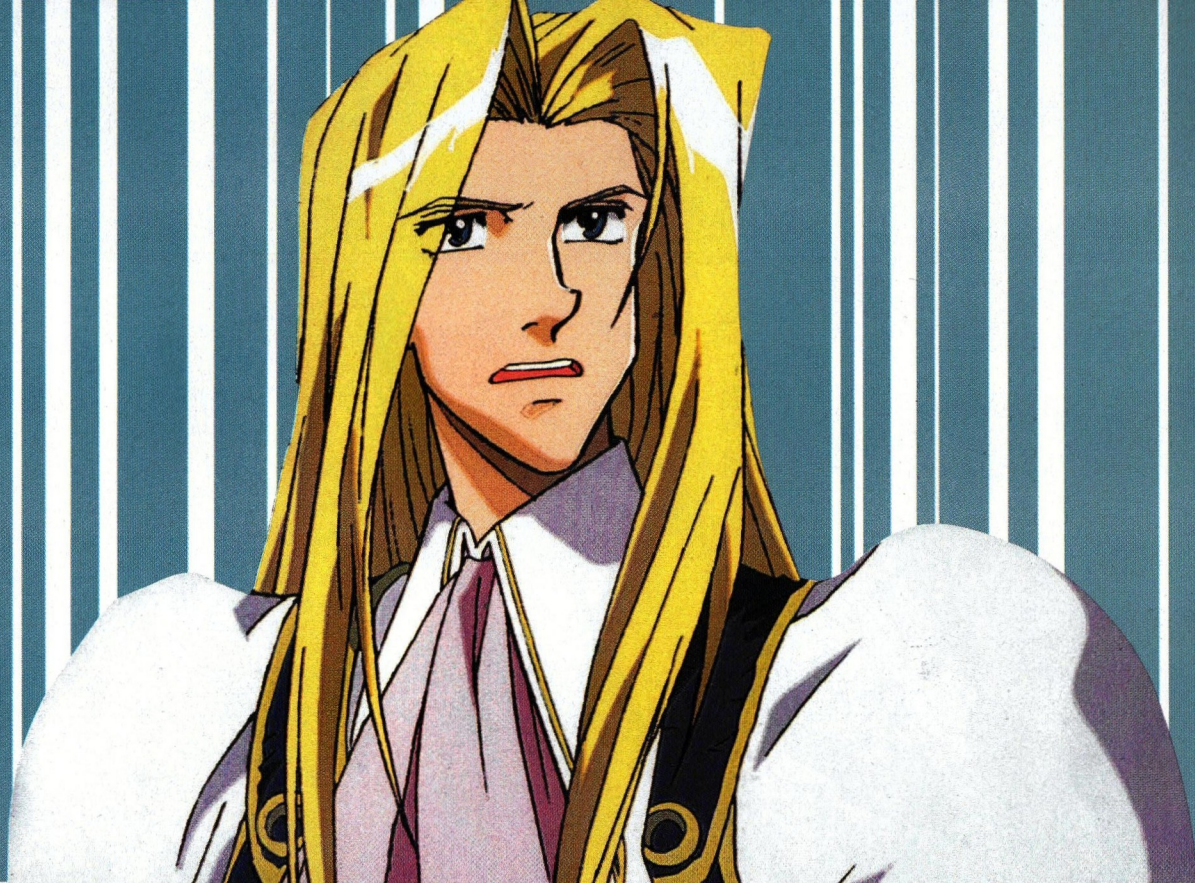
ORIGINAL MANGA: Masahiro Totsuka and Aguri Igarashi

MUSIC: Kiyohiko Senba

ANIMATION PRODUCTION: AIC ASTA (*Gun Sword*)

CAST: Toraji "Kojiro" Ishida: Katsuyuki Konishi (Kamina in *Gurren Lagann*); Tamaki Kawazoe: Ryou Hirohashi (Sora Naegino in *Kaleido Star*); Kirino Chiba: Megumi Toyoguchi (Winry Rockbell in *Fullmetal Alchemist*); Miyako Miyazaki: Houko Kuwashima (Sango in *Inuyasha*); Sayako Kuwahara: Sachiko Kojima (Monad in *Ergo Proxy*); Satori Azuma: Rina Satou (Negi in *Negima!*)





**ALLEN
SCHEZAR**
The Vision of Escaflowne



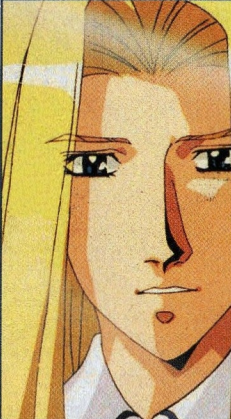
**GÜNTER
VON CHRIST**
Kyo Kara Maoh!



lastman standing

激戦爆発

BY ABE CHANG

ALLEN SCHEZAR		GÜNTER VON CHRIST	
	Knight of Asturia	POSITION	Advisor to Yuri, the Maoh
	Royal women, schoolgirls	ROMANTIC INTERESTS	Yuri and only Yuri
	All's fair in love and war	PHILOSOPHY	Smile until you snap
	Bouncing, behaving blond	HAIRSTYLE	Royal, restrained purple
	He's a deadbeat dad	DARK SECRET	He's a warmonger
A man of mystery and nobility, Allen Schezar's chivalrous appearance contrasts with his warrior's heart. He's something of a selfish playboy when it comes to women, but he's skilled at swordplay and at piloting a Guymelef in defense of Asturia.		As a mentor to the newly crowned Yuri, Günter's only desire is to serve the young king. His skills as a magician and swordsman have proven invaluable to the Maoh but, deep down, Günter is more of a lover than a fighter—especially when it comes to his liege.	

THE BATTLE BEGINS

"My lady." Allen drops to one knee and kisses the hand of the red-haired girl standing in the courtyard. "I beg your forgiveness, but I have important business to attend to back in Asturia and must return post-haste. I was told that your king might have artisans capable of servicing my Guymelef."

"Guymelef? What's a Guymelef?" Anissina asks just before she spots the enormous, regally outfitted Scheherazade mecha on one knee just outside the royal grounds. "Oh."

"Would you like a closer look?" Allen asks, as a commotion breaks out behind him.

"Leave me alone!" With a shout, Yuri streaks down the path and pushes past Allen. Taken aback, Allen barely has time to compose himself before Günter crashes into them, knocking Anissina to the ground.

"Your Majesty, come back! You can't possibly leave in the middle of this important lesson!" Günter cries as Yuri rounds the corner.

Allen picks the dazed Anissina up from the dirt, and then furiously grabs Günter by the collar.

"I swear on all of Gaea that you will beg this poor girl for forgiveness!" he growls into the perplexed royal advisor's face.

"Sir, this is no poor girl!" Günter begins. "She's much tougher than she looks, in fact she torments us all with..."

"You're one to talk!" Anissina interrupts. "You're always torturing Yuri! The poor thing doesn't get a moment's peace with you around!"

"My relationship with Yuri is—" Günter's again interrupted as Allen backhands him across the face.

Clasping a hand to his throbbing cheek, Günter narrows his eyes with steely intensity. "A duel, then?" he asks.

"For the lady's honor!" Allen swiftly draws his sword and holds it an inch from Günter's face. "And the honor of the other innocent maiden you're tormenting! Yuri, was it?"

"Wait, Yuri isn't..." Anissina breaks in.

"You will *not* speak so lightly of our ruler!" Günter steps back and closes his eyes for a moment as the winds swirl about him. His whipping purple hair suddenly reveals a torrent of daggers.

Allen dodges the bevy of blades, knocking them away with his sword.

He snatches one from the air and sends it flying back at Günter.

Günter calmly stares at the oncoming blade, a dark hole opening in the space before him to swallow the knife. Allen blinks in surprise, and the hole reappears above him. A storm of daggers rains down, but Allen quickly flips out of the way and charges at Günter.

With blind fury fueling him, Günter meets Allen's blade with his own, sparks flying as they lock swords. The two dodge, parry and twirl, finally breaking apart when Allen drops low and lands a kick in Günter's middle.

As his foe drops back, Allen runs to his resting Guymelef and smoothly leaps into its open cockpit.

"A suit of armor?" Günter gasps, getting to his feet. "*That's cheating!*"

"Wouldn't be the first time," Allen remarks, grinning as the Guymelef shudders to life. One huge mechanical arm raises a massive sword high above Günter—and then halts. The Guymelef grinds to a stop, its cockpit half-open.

"What?" Allen looks at the broken mecha, and then at his angry foe.

Günter stands, and a blast of energy streaks from his palm into Allen's Guymelef, throwing it back into the castle wall. Both Allen and Scheherazade disappear in a roaring avalanche of stones.

THE WINNAH

"It shouldn't be too hard to repair," Anissina says, looking over the wreckage. "The wall, that is. Your... armor might take a little longer."

"I am indebted to you, my lady," a battered Allen Schezar says, sitting atop his partially stone-covered Guymelef. "I had no idea you were this castle's resident mechanic."

"Inventor," she corrects. "And I suppose it's the least we can do, since Günter's almost killed you."

"I did?" Günter looks over to Allen. "I'm sorry for my rudeness. When I'm separated from Yuri, I... I just lose all composure."

"I'll accept your apology," Allen says with a wink. "Provided you introduce me to this fair creature 'Yuri,' who's evidently caught your attention."

"I *don't* think that will be necessary, sir!" Günter turns around in a huff and heads back into the castle's recesses. "I have enough rivals as it is..."

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Have an idea for an anime match-up? Let us know at anime-insider@wizardent.com!

VOICES OF A LUCKY

The sky's the limit as 'A.I.' reveals the secrets of dubbed anime cult hit

By Summer Mullins

Love it or hate it, English dubbing of anime is a vital part of the industry, and one that allows it to offer a more personal experience to anime fans while reaching out to non-fans. This year marks prolific dubbing studio Bang Zoom!'s 15th anniversary, and this month marks Bandai's release of cult-fave series *Lucky Star*, which Bang Zoom! lovingly dubbed. In honor of the double celebration, *Anime Insider* is going behind the scenes at Bang Zoom! to discover how an anime series is dubbed and just what makes *Lucky Star* so unique.

What started as the two-person endeavor of Eric Sherman and Kaeko Sakamoto in 1993 has grown to a highly respected dubbing powerhouse. From the company's first anime projects (*Ninja Cadets* and *Magic Knight Rayearth*), Bang Zoom! has pursued one ideal: to keep adaptations faithful while being entertaining.

Sherman freely acknowledges the problems that some fans have with dubs. "There are a lot of bad dubs out there. There's a lot of product that comes to the marketplace from people who maybe just don't have the time that they need to spend on it or who maybe don't have the technical expertise. That's why a lot of fans say that dubs suck and that they want to watch the original Japanese. I feel the same in many cases. But when you can watch something in your native language, it's so much more visceral and accessible. I find that watching a really good dub can equal that original experience."

So why should you watch a dub? Because, believe it or not, the Japanese licensor has a lot more input into the process than you would imagine. Using *Lucky Star* as an example, we'll reveal the complicated steps of the dubbing process, while introducing you to the series that just might be the next *Seinfeld*. You know, if *Seinfeld* were about otaku girls.



STAR

ing an



MOOD LIGHTING The studios at Bang Zoom! Entertainment are set up for maximum efficiency (and minimum monitor glare).



THE LEADER OF THE PACK Eric Sherman (5th from R) and Kaeko Sakamoto (2nd from L) post with some of the staff at Bang Zoom!

THE GLORIOUS PROCESS OF DUBBING

NINE STEPS AND MANY MONTHS ADD UP TO ONE ENTERTAINING ANIME

So how's an anime like *Lucky Star* get dubbed? We sat down with Sherman for a step-by-step guide to the process of creating an English dub.

1. RECEIVE MATERIALS

The licensing companies—in this case, Bandai and Kadokawa—send the dubbing studio digi-beta videos and scripts, all of which are in Japanese.

2. CHOOSE A TRANSLATOR

Bang Zoom! handpicks the translator for each project, seeking one who is uniquely suited to translate the Japanese scripts into English. Clearly, anyone who knew a lot about Japanese videogames had an edge for this job, as *Lucky Star* contains a lot of references to hardcore otaku culture. For the most part, translators work on a freelance basis, and so can be located anywhere in the world!

3. TRANSLATE MATERIALS

The production staff prepares QuickTime videos of the raw episodes and sends them and the Japanese scripts off to the

translator. The translator will return a "raw" translation.

4. SPOT THE EPISODES

A bilingual staffer will double check the translated scripts for accuracy and flag any problem areas. He will also assign a time-code to each line of dialogue to indicate at exactly what frame the character begins to open their mouth for each line.

The staffer will make additional notes about special lines, such as ones said off-screen. Since offscreen lines don't require the precise timing of onscreen lines, they're generally faster to perfect than onscreen lines. All of these notes give the director an idea of how long each recording session will take.

5. ADAPT THE SCRIPT

The script is passed to the ADR writer, whose job is manifold.

First, the writer must adjust the lines of the pure translation to match the mouth flap as closely as possible...otherwise, it's bad '70s kung-fu movie time. Additionally, the strict translation must be turned into believable English dialogue.

"It might be a line that literally means, 'I go now there,'" says Sherman. "The writer's job is to make that sound like real dialogue."

Throughout the whole process, the writer will be watching additional material referenced in the series to fully understand all of the in-jokes. But watching anime as a part of your job comes with some drawbacks.

"I can't finish watching a series because I have to keep writing," bemoans *Lucky Star* ADR writer Alex Von David (*The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, *Rozen Maiden*). "That kinda sucks when you're getting into something... I don't even want to start playing some of the games that are referenced, because nothing would get done!"

6. MAKE SURE NO ONE GOT CARRIED AWAY

A Bang Zoom! producer checks the ADR script to make sure that the writer didn't stray from the raw translation too much.

"Sometimes the writer comes up with something that's too far away in their attempt to fit mouth flap," notes Sherman. Notes are passed back to the ADR writer, who will rewrite the dialogue.

LIP GLOSS(ARY) A GUIDE TO THE LINGO OF DUBBING

DIGI-BETA Short for digital betacam tape. Videotape is still used for TV broadcast purposes—it's just advanced light years past your dad's VHS tapes.

MNS Mouth not seen. This is a note that's made on a script next to any line that is spoken from offscreen.

MOUTH FLAP The opening and closing movement of a character's mouth.

RAW TRANSLATION The first translation of an episode script, which is simply a direct translation of what the words literally mean, and not what regular people would say instead in English.

Often a raw translation can be almost incomprehensible due to regional idioms and other complicated ways of speaking.

SPOTTED SCRIPT Spotting is the process of assigning a precise time code to every line of dialogue in an episode, so a spotted script is one that contains a time code for each line.

TIME CODE A running clock from the beginning of the episode. For example, 13:21 would mean 13 minutes and 21 seconds into the episode.



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RISING STARS

MEET THE LOVELY LITTLE LADIES OF 'LUCKY STAR'



KONATA IZUMI—She's smart, athletic and tiny, but don't let that fool you—Konata gets terrible grades, avoids all school clubs and is in fact 18. Alas, it's her love of anime, manga and video games that causes her to stay up all night and sleep during her classes, while she's delighted to work at a cosplay café. Her favorite series is *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*.



KAGAMI HIRAGI—Tsukasa's twin sister is an excellent student, and even the class president. Although she's obsessed with her weight and keeping trim, she is constantly eating sweets. Kagami loves videogames in general, and old-school shooters in particular.



TSUKASA HIRAGI—Although she's Kagami's twin, Tsukasa is Kagami's opposite. She's so-so at school, but cooks like a master chef (while Kagami is a miserable cook). She enjoys *Sgt. Frog*, but she's hardly an otaku.



MIYUKI TAKARA—The glasses-wearing Miyuki is incredibly polite and pretty quiet, having come from a wealthy family. The former class president, she's just as smart as Kagami, but less goofy. Konata frequently assaults her, calling her the living embodiment of moe.



AYANO MINEGISHI—Ayano is Kagami's classmate, and generally quiet and kind...unless you get her mad. She's the only *Lucky Star* girl with a boyfriend.



PATRICIA MARTIN—This American otaku transferred into school, but since her view of Japan came only from anime, she has weird ideas about her classmates. She's obsessed with yaoi and bands that perform anime theme songs.



YUTAKA KOBAYAKAWA—This scatterbrained 15-year-old is tiny and sickly—and the only character shorter than Konata. She's cheerful and looks up to Konata.



MINAMI IWASAKI—Most of her classmates think Minami's the strong, silent type, but really she's just quiet. She's pals with both Miyuki and Yutaka.



HIYORI TAMURA—This otaku is a doujinshi artist who's impressively scatter-brained and easily distracted. She often imagines her best friends Yutaka and Minami as models for her comics.

■ Rob Bricken

7. GET CLIENT APPROVAL

The final script is sent to the clients (again, Bandai and Kadokawa for *Lucky Star*), who will review it and mark any changes. Generally, this is at least the third pass that the ADR writer makes at the script, and is a step that can be repeated many times.

8. SELECT THE VOICE ACTORS

Concurrent to script approval, a casting director is hard at work on the most difficult part of any series—casting the first volume. Any new series has an average of seven main characters, and multiple people will audition for each part.

"We usually end up with hundreds of auditions altogether for each new series," says Sherman.

The client reviews recordings of the auditions and will make recommendations on casting to Bang Zoom! Sometimes the tapes are even sent to Japan for the original creator to review. Who says dubs are made without any input from the source?

9. RECORD THE SERIES

After the actor enters the recording booth, a director, engineer and producer from Bang Zoom! supervise the recording, often with a producer from the client's side of things present.

Since for most voice actors, the recording session is the first time they see the show, the director will explain the series, and together with the actor, will establish the character. If that doesn't sound ideal, just remember that while many voice actors are also fans, most just don't have time to be on the cutting edge of content. It's a busy industry.



BY THE NUMBERS

6,000 Backup discs in Bang Zoom!'s vault

80 Square feet in an average BZ recording booth

27 Computers at BZ

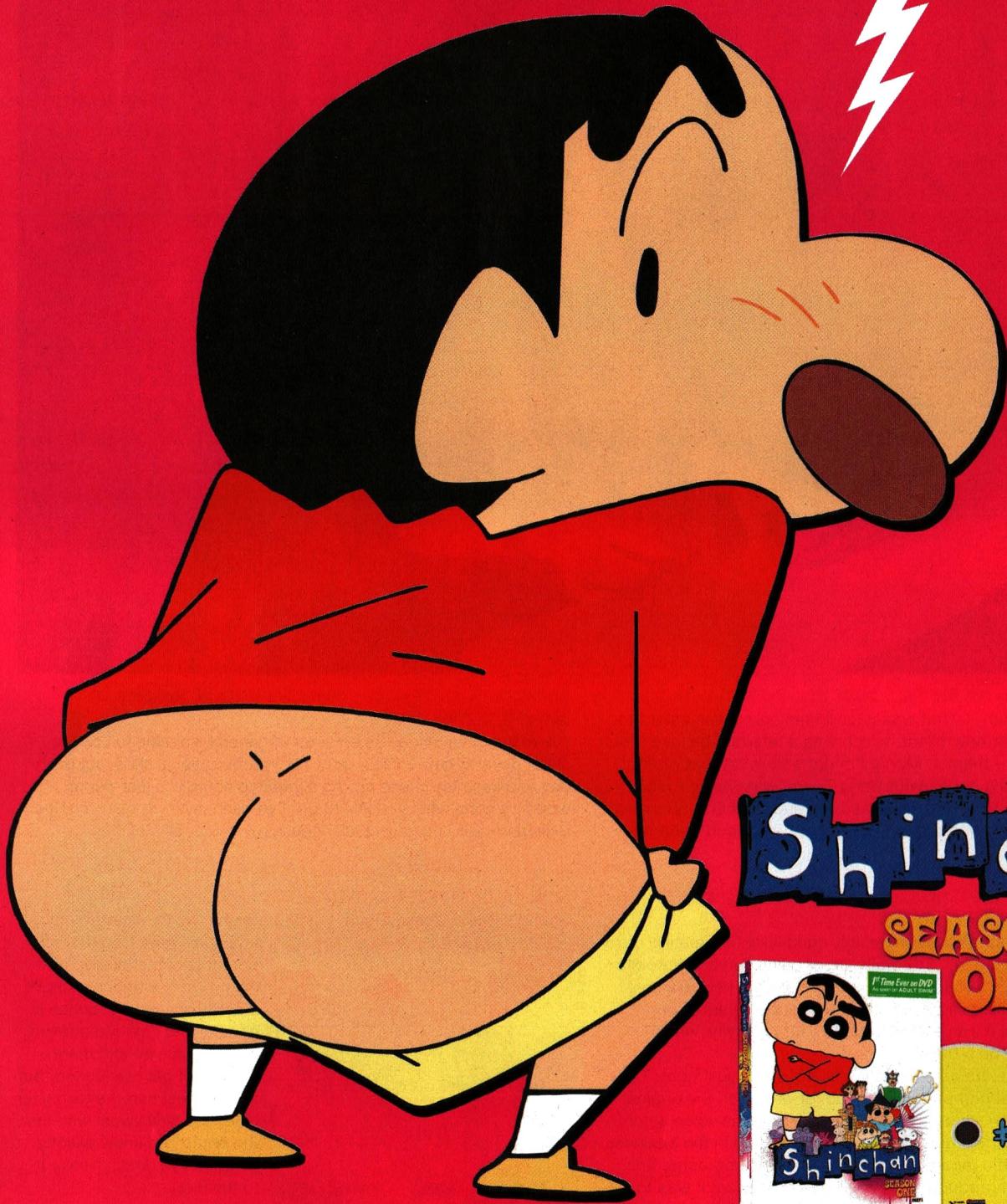
24 Hours longest day Sherman has ever worked

15 Dedicated fulltime BZ staff

3 Separate BZ facilities

0 Percent turnover in production at BZ in the last 6 years

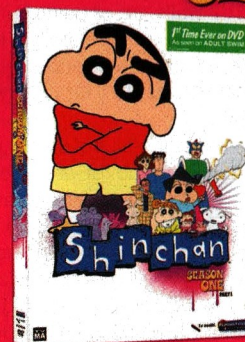
THE POTTY STARTS HERE!



Shinchan

SEASON ONE

PART 1



OWN THE DVD MAY 13TH

tv asahi. **FUNIMATION**
ENTERTAINMENT

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As seen on **ADULT SWIM™**

LUCK BE A LADY

VOICE ACTRESS WENDEE LEE STARTED AS A MAGIC KNIGHT AND WENT ON TO BECOME A DIRECTOR



ANIME INSIDER: HOW DID YOU FIRST START WORKING WITH BANG ZOOM!?

WENDEE LEE: Oh man... That was a long time ago. I was asked to come audition for a new client, which was a referral I believe Mona Marshall gave me—thanks, Mona! I'm not sure what that project was, but my first big series with Bang Zoom! was *Magic Knight Rayearth*. I played Umi and Princess Emeraud, and Eric Sherman was the director. We had a blast working together and became fast friends.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS PARTICULARLY COOL OR DIFFERENT ABOUT BANG ZOOM!?

First of all, of their studios are incredibly conducive for creating crazy characters and having fun. The walls are all painted in bright colors and there are clouds floating on the ceiling—really! There are toys and plushies from all their series and scrolls and posters of our shows everywhere! It's a great atmosphere for creativity, which encourages you to be a big kid.

They also take extra care in getting all the details just right. They were one of the first companies I worked for who used the original Japanese performances as a guide for us to match as voice actors. Until then, most of the studios I had worked for were in the business of localizing with little regard to what the Japanese had done. Eric was one of the first producers to explain how important it was to the fans to maintain the spirit of the Japanese. That's a goal I am well aware of to this day and forever have in mind when directing.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN VOICE ACTING?

A long time... My first series was *Robotech* in the mid '80s... So that's, like, over 20 years. Woo-hoo! And let's hope there are many more to come.

DO YOU THINK YOU'VE MADE STRIDES FORWARD IN THAT TIME WITH REGARDS TO CHARACTERIZATION AND VOICE RANGE?

I've made great strides as an actor in general. I'm able to hone my skills, develop new voices, grow my improvisational skills, act every day and keep my chops up. As a working actor, you just wanna work! It's sorta what you live to do. I've been given so many choice roles and I still find new challenges in my career all the time.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIKE AND PLAY AROUND WITH THE SOUND SET-UP?

Sound set-up? Not so much. I may put in my two cents every now and again regarding that stuff, but most of that comes from my music background. I have a pretty sharp sonic sense in general and I tend to pick up little things here and there that might get overlooked, but for the most part the technical guys and girls I work with are the *bomb* and know exactly what they're doing. I leave it to the pros.



WHAT DO YOU THINK IS FUN ABOUT LUCKY STAR AS A SHOW?

Lucky Star is a blast to be a part of. I just hope the viewers enjoy it as much as we do. We sure have fun recording it. All the inside references to other shows and pop culture are incredibly entertaining.



I also love how irreverent the kids and content can be. It breaks a lot of rules in a way we've never seen with anime before, and that gives the show a very contemporary feel.

YOUR CHARACTER, KONATA, IS SMART AND ATHLETIC BUT DOESN'T REALLY PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES. WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVITIES DID YOU DO WHEN YOU WERE IN SCHOOL?

Anything creative or artistic. I was of course into drama, musical production, stagecraft, costuming, dancing, singing, writing, poetry, art, cooking, drill team, student government, debating, chorus, photography, philosophy, psychology, astronomy, mythology, history and science. Ahh! Big breath.

DID YOU DO ANY SPECIAL PREPARATION FOR THE ROLE OF A TEENAGE OTAKU?

At this point in my career, I am a blank slate for the character to grow in. I let the sounds and images make their way into my interpretation of what the director is looking for and then meld it into my own performance. I draw from what the original performer did and add a little flair of my own to enhance and maintain the original intent.

Did I go otaku for the role? No, but I know otaku and have lots of live examples to pull from. I've seen my share of cosplayers and

have attended plenty of conventions. I'm just sayin' some of you guys are *cur-ra-zy!* Gotta love it.

CAN YOU RELATE TO KONATA, OR IS SHE THE TOTAL OPPOSITE OF YOU?

I wouldn't say I totally *relate* to Konata, but I definitely feel her at times. I love her dry sense of humor and outside-ness. She's off-beat and kinda subversive, like me! She sees the world and her place in it uniquely and she's not afraid to tell ya what time it is! I like her sass and moodiness. That's really fun to play as an actress. It's cool being different and Konata's not afraid of being exactly who she is. I can relate to that.

AS A VIEWER, WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE ANIME SERIES THAT YOU'VE WORKED ON?

As a viewer... Wow, I never think of myself as a viewer. I'm always acting, adapting or directing, so that's an interesting question...

There are things I love about all the shows I work on. I like the spunk and confidence of Haruhi in *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*. It was really fun recording Haruhi's songs, too. I like the quirkiness of *Lucky Star* and the girl-power the friends share. I love the edginess and action of *Bleach* and all the complicated storylines. I love the comedy and drunkenness of Weda in *Haré+Guu*, Maya's kick-ass toughness in *Tenjo Tenge*, Fee's dry sense of humor and mind in *Planetes*, and the boldness, style and sex appeal of Faye from *Cowboy Bebop*.

Honestly, I like something about every show I've been in. Guess I like what I do!

IF YOU WERE BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL AND HAD TO CHOOSE A CLUB, WHICH ONE WOULD IT BE?

What's left? I'm still the same kid at heart and would dabble in all of them all over again if given the chance. But there's something to be said for experience. I appreciate the wisdom my life experience has given me and seldom look longingly back at the past. I'm future-bound and ready for tomorrow's challenges. Everyday is truly an adventure and I love the life I'm living.

GETTING LUCKY

THE INSANE DEPTHS OF 'LUCKY STAR' FANDOM

To say *Lucky Star* is popular in Japan is like calling Akihabara "a neat place to see"—both sentences are true, but they hardly tell the whole story.

Despite being based on a simple, four-panel comic, the manga and anime have spawned a PlayStation 2 story game, two Nintendo DS games, a novel and (almost literally) a jillion CDs, from dramas to character songs. Much like its spiritual predecessor, *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* (with which the series also shares an American dub writer), *Lucky Star* has also spawned a fan dance, which its otaku have performed at cons both in Japan and America.

Lucky Star has also garnered a legion of obsessed fans who will do anything—and go anywhere—to celebrate the show. For instance, since the characters and the school the characters attend are in real cities in Japan, fans have visited Konata's "hometown" and school in droves to pay their respects and take pictures. Sometimes, to the initial consternation of the locals, while dressed as characters from the series.

Lucky Star is based in Kasukabe, located in the Saitama prefecture, which is part of the Greater Tokyo Area, and so easy to access by train. The most popular location for *Lucky Star* fans to visit is the Washinomiya shrine (below), at which the characters of Tsukasa and Kagami Hiragi work, and a recent sponsored *Lucky Star* event held there drew over 3,500 fans.

So many otaku have traveled to Saitama that the cities of Saita and Washinomiya have both sponsored their own *Lucky Star* events to capitalize on the otaku tourist trade. ■ RB



POETRY SLAMMED

THE RESULTS OF OUR 50TH-ISSUE HAIKU CONTEST

By The A.I. Staff

The haiku has been known as such for over 100 years, and probably existed in unnamed form for centuries more. So we at *Anime Insider* figured that it had just enough of a résumé to help mark our big 50th-issue celebration, and we asked you all to join in by writing your own 17-syllable Japanese poems. And write you did—nearly two thousand haiku showed up in our mailbox, and we read them all. We laughed, we cringed and then we laughed even harder throughout our rigid judging process, but eventually the winners emerged. It was hard to choose, but we ultimately went with the funniest, the most creative and the most likely to make us smile during the next brutal deadline. Below, we're presenting the grand prize winner along with the top haiku in each of our four categories, plus some other entries that we liked too much to deny print.

GRAND PRIZE

Pika pikachu
Chu pika pika chupi
Pii chu pikachu

Rosalyn Jennifer Phipps, 17
El Monte, CA



FAVORITE CHARACTER

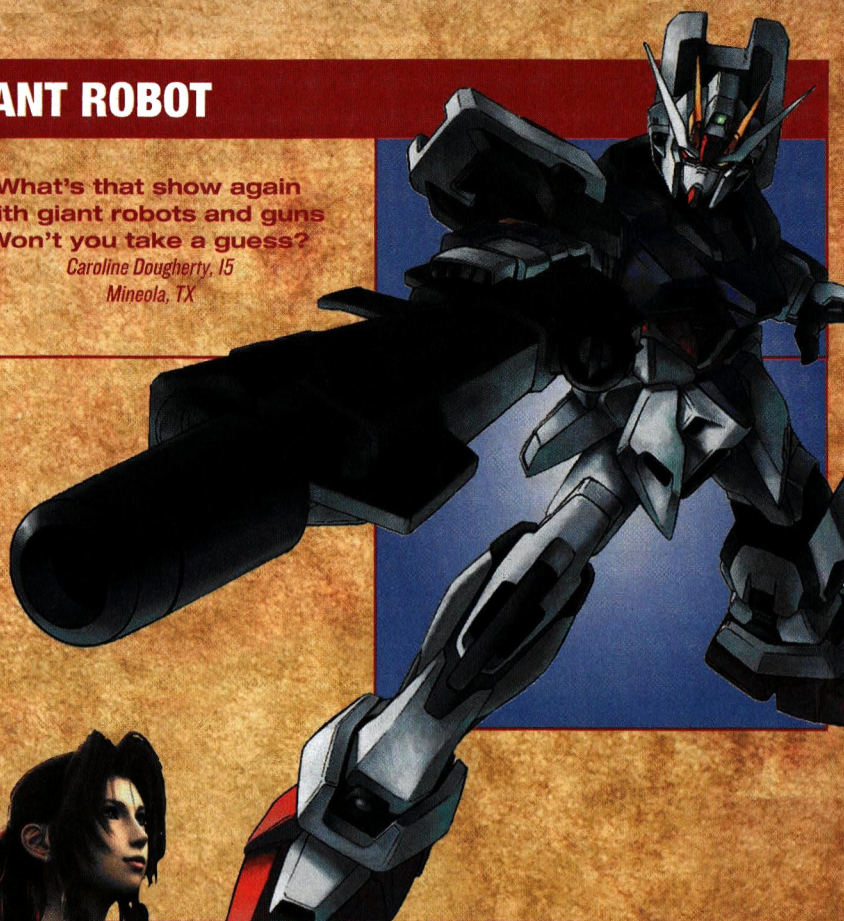
Poor ballerina
The duckling curse holds you back
Just say "no" to "quack"
Matthew M. Richardson, 23
College Station, TX



GIANT ROBOT

What's that show again
With giant robots and guns
Won't you take a guess?

Caroline Dougherty, 15
Mineola, TX



FANDOM

Aeris is still dead
But I will not believe it
It's fanfiction time

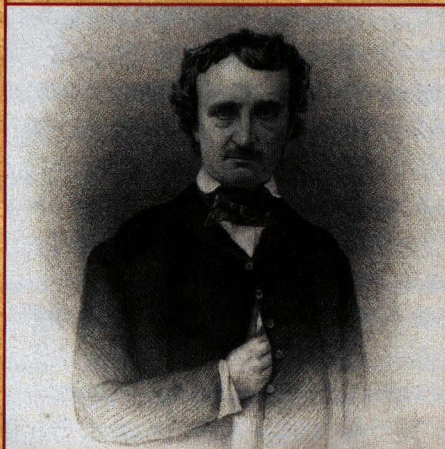
Katherine Rohrscheib, 15
Warrensburg, IL



MAGAZINE

A haiku contest
What do you guys think we are
Poets or something?

Courtney Mincy, 27
Counce, TN



HONORABLE MENTIONS

NOT EVERYONE CAN BE A WINNER, BUT
HERE ARE MORE ENTRIES WE ENJOYED

You wish you had some
Ninja maids in black outfits
Serve hot tea and death

Andrew Ferreira, Athens, GA 24

Sir, put some clothes on
Spandex can't contain your girth
"Sailor Moon," my foot

Kendra Wells, Bhaia, NY 16

A psychologist
Would have a couple problems
With fifty issues

Ryan Lynch, West Springfield, MA 20

If only they could
Say the stuff you people write
In the word bubbles

Crystal Haroon, New Hyde Park, NY 16

Oh, Gundam pilot
Never land in the foreground
Death ensues quickly

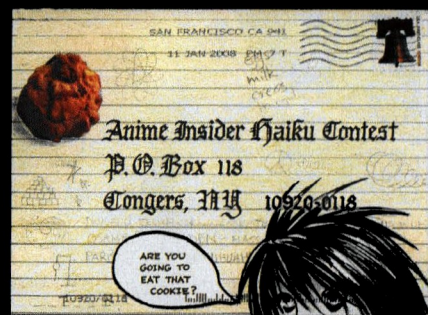
Kristin Hamann, Northfield, MN 20

The day I found out
I would never meet Lupin
I died a little

Hailey Deer, San Diego, CA 16

Her name is Excel
She's insane and dangerous
She also eats dogs

Alex Lucas, Pawleys Island, SC 19



BY THE NUMBERS

- 1,921 Total haiku entries received
- 1,740 Dollars worth of prizes we just gave away
- 625 Haiku disqualified for not following the rules
- 59 Age of oldest entrant
- 17 Syllables in a haiku
- 8 Age of youngest entrant
- 3 Haiku about Man-Faye
- 3 Haiku about Editor Summer Mullins
- 2 Haiku about former Editor Rob Bricken
- 1 Entrant who sent in 24 copies of the same haiku

THE SECRET

AN EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT JAPAN'S HOTTEST SEVEN-PART ANIME MOVIE SERIES, 'GARDEN OF SINNERS'

By Andrez Bergen



If you're looking for the hottest numbers game in Japan right now, skip the pachinko parlors and head straight for lucky number seven. It just happens to be the number of movies that will eventually fill out the cinematic anime experience that is *Kara no Kyoukai* (*Garden of Sinners*).

It's a seven-part movie series, the first installment of which bowed in December at its exclusive engagement in Tokyo's Theatres Shinjuku. Based on a light novel series by Kinoko Nasu and illustrated by Takashi Takeuchi (the duo that later formed the gaming company Type-Moon), it precedes their later work *Lunar Legend Tsukihime*, and includes some themes that will be familiar to fans of that videogame-turned-anime—for instance, a main character who can see the lines that connect life...and cut them.

With Aniplex (*Fullmetal Alchemist*) producing, the superb animation has been rendered by ufotable (*Honey & Clover*). And, in an innovative move, the director's chair is being rotated, with the first three installments helmed by *Coyote Ragtime Show* regulars Ei Aoki, Takuya Nonaka and Mitsuru Obunai.

Think action, knives, gravitating people, supernatural mojo, split personality disorders, a new take on the whole "yin & yang" thing and more; it's the kind of fare that only anime and manga creative types seem to be whipping up. While the seven-film series has yet to be licensed in North America, *Anime Insider* scored an interview with producer Hikaru Kondo, who connects the four movies released so far like a line of life himself. Read on for your exclusive introduction to the *Garden of Sinners*.

GARDEN

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

A SUMMARY OF THE FIRST FOUR HEART-POUNDING MOVIE INSTALLMENTS

GARDEN OF SINNERS: FUKAN FUKU

RELEASED DECEMBER 1, 2007

It's the summer of 1998, and rumors are swirling around the mysterious deaths of several high school girls who jumped off a building for no apparent reason, not to mention the reports of ghosts flying around that same building.

It's in this setting that we meet college dropout Mikiya Kokuto, who works for sorceress Toko Aozaki, and Mikiya's friend Shiki Ryogi, who was in a coma for two years and, since reawakening, has the ability to foresee death.

After investigating the schoolgirl deaths, Shiki has a rooftop run-in with the entity responsible. She and Toko learn that this apparition is itself the astral projection of a bed-ridden, disabled girl named Fujo, who has lucid dreams of flying...



in a bar amid the dismembered body parts of her assailants.

Mikiya finds Fujino sitting in the street in the pouring rain and puts her up for the night. It's a nice gesture, but Mikiya's preoccupied with the disarray of his personal finances, and he volunteers to do some detective work to make ends meet.

Shiki is busy scouring the streets for the barroom murderer, and chances across Fujino in the company of Mikiya's sister, Azaka. Fujino proves Shiki's suspicions by tearing apart another low-life with the mere power of her concentration, and duels with Shiki over a bridge—a battle that costs Shiki a body part of her own and puts her in a coma.

GARDEN OF SINNERS: SATSUJIN KOSATSU

RELEASED DECEMBER 29, 2007

The second part flashes back to 1995, which is when the talkative, easygoing Mikiya first meets Shiki. At the time, Shiki is a pretty, if sullen, student dressed in a stunning kimono and on the prowl for a serial killer—and who pegs Mikiya for the part. However, Shiki's own schizophrenic behavior makes Mikiya wonder if she could be the killer herself.

This certainly isn't helped when, one rainy night, Shiki approaches Mikiya with knife in hand and slashes at him, saying that she wants to kill him. It soon emerges that Shiki has two personalities: the female Shiki and the male Shiki. Shiki's family trained their children not only in different types of martial arts and fencing, but also in dividing their inner selves: one masculine and harmful; the other feminine and productive.

GARDEN OF SINNERS: TSUKAKU ZANRYU

RELEASED JANUARY 26, 2008

By the third movie, we're back in 1998, a month before the first installment. Fujino, a classmate of Mikiya's sister, wakes up

GARDEN OF SINNERS: GARANDO

RELEASE DATE NOT SET AT PRESS TIME

Chapter four returns to June 1998, when Shiki first reawakens from her coma. The first thing she tries to do is gouge her own eyes out.

The wound isn't severe enough for her to lose her eyesight, but she's forced to wear a protective bandage over her eyes and talk to an unseen counselor about her complicated situation. During these talks she reveals how one of her dual personalities—the male side—died in the battle with Fujino, while the female side survived.

Shiki's counselor is Toko, who reports on Shiki's condition to Mikiya. But now Shiki realizes that a ghost is attempting to take over her body by entering into the hollow part of her mind where the male Shiki once resided.

A devastating struggle ensues inside the hospital and then outside, and Toko comes to Shiki's aid as they attempt to destroy the possessive spirit.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

An exclusive interview with 'Garden of Sinners' producer Hikaru Kondo



TOKO (LEFT) AND SHIKI

ANIME INSIDER: THE CONCEPT OF SEVEN MOVIES IS A REVOLUTIONARY ONE FOR ANIME. HOW DID THIS DAUNTING PROJECT GET APPROVED?

KONDO: At the start, we decided that this would be the charm of the project. The original seven stories are connected to be a single big story, and if any were omitted, the story could not be integrated together.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS WITH A MOVIE SERIES OF SEVEN PARTS?

The production itself is quite difficult. If you think simply about time, it's a commitment of two hours each for more than three movies. But its very existence is a benefit, and above all it's an innovative attempt.

DIFFERENT DIRECTORS ARE INVOLVED IN EACH MOVIE (THE FIRST THREE INSTALLMENTS HAVING BEEN HELMED BY COYOTE RAGTIME SHOW STAFFERS EI AOKI, TAKUYA NONAKA AND MITSURU OBUNAI). WHY NOT CHOOSE JUST THE ONE DIRECTOR?

There is an emotional story, a high action story, a "moe" story; the seven tales contain all of these traits, so the most suitable supervisor was chosen for each. Consequentially, each director came to improve their own work, because of the competitive aspect.

HOW DO ALL THESE DIFFERENT PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE SEVEN MOVIES CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE SERIES?

This success was not possible without the power of high-quality images. New power is given to the work, without damaging the charm of the original [novels]. The ufotable staff and the music and art staff outside of ufotable worked together to understand *Garden of Sinners* and make it a better production. A happy environment for work like this is unusual.

THE VOICE ACTORS INCLUDE KENICHI SUZUMURA (SHINN ASUKA IN *MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM SEED*) AND MAAYA SAKAMOTO, WHO DID THE THEME SONG FOR *WOLF'S RAIN* AND PLAYED PRINCESS TOMOYO IN *TSUBASA: RESERVOIR CHRONICLE*. HOW DID YOU DECIDE ON THE STARS?

Even though those two voice actors are popular, the casting is purely a result of auditioning. Their voices were a perfect fit. The director, the original writer and the producer were perfect, too.

THE CHARACTER DESIGNS BY OBUNAI, TAKURO TAKASHI AND TOMONORI SUDOU ARE BASED ON THE ORIGINALS BY TAKASHI TAKEUCHI. HOW DO YOU FEEL THEY ARE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER ANIME MOVIES OR SERIES?

Of course, each one is a wonderful animator. They have been dedicated to ufotable for several years. The team at ufotable has a oneness. Because of the team, the quality can be kept high by intertwining drawing, production, photography and CG processing, and so on. I think that difference is the strong point.

WHAT IS THE OVERALL THEME OF THE MOVIES, AND THE STORY YOU ARE TRYING TO TELL?

People and their relationships. Everyone, however imperfect, somehow lives through their relationship with others.

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTER, AND WHY?

Shiki Ryogi. I have no particular reason, but I daresay it has to do with being a boy as a hobby...

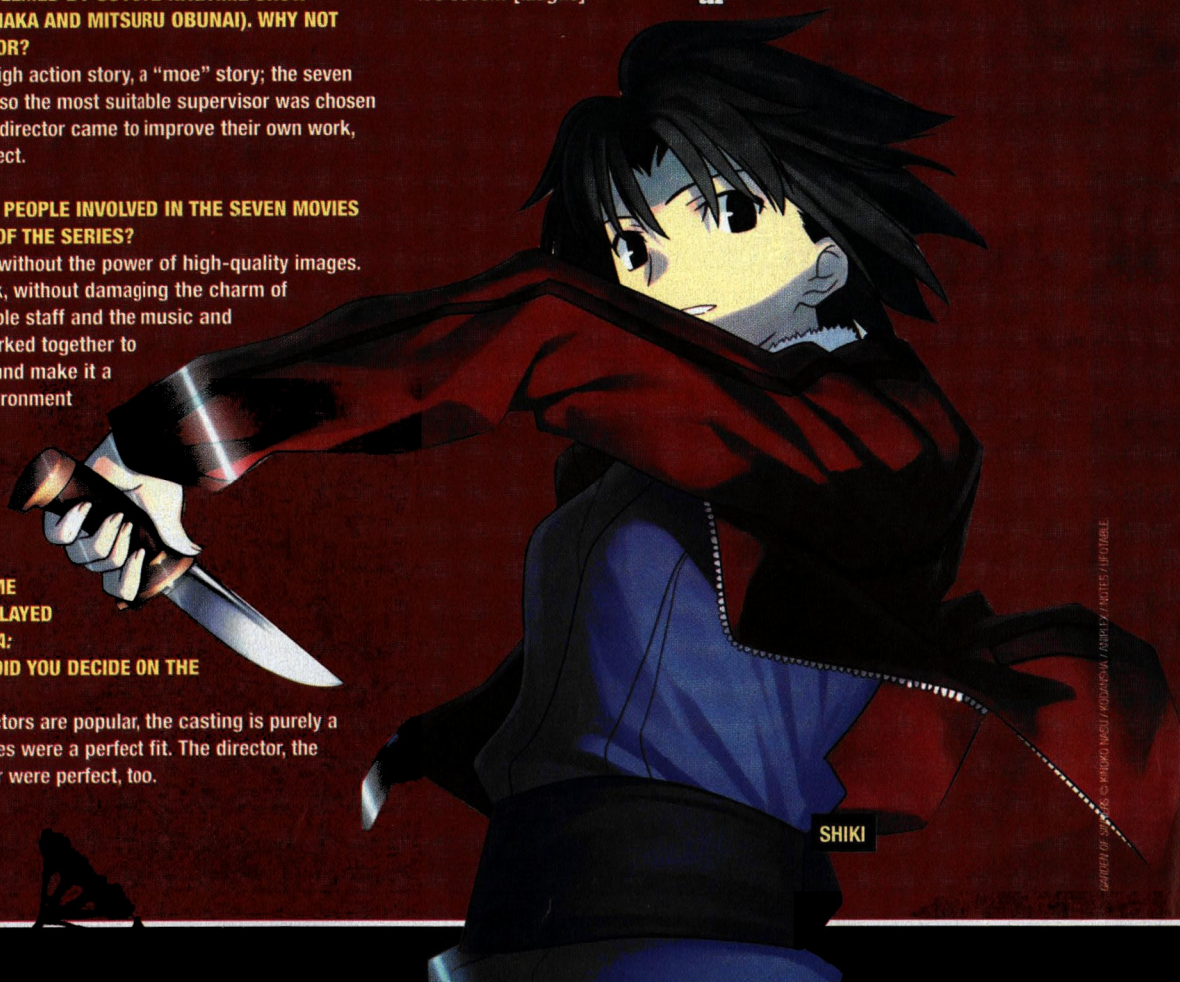
THE NUMBER SEVEN IS CONSIDERED LUCKY: THERE ARE SEVEN GODS OF GOOD LUCK, JAPANESE BUDDHISTS BELIEVE FOLKS ARE REINCARNATED SEVEN TIMES, IN *DRAGON BALL* THERE ARE SEVEN WISH-GRANTING DRAGON BALLS AND AKIRA KUROSAWA'S MOST FAMOUS MOVIE HAD SEVEN SAMURAI. *GARDEN OF SINNERS* IS A SEVEN-PART SERIES. WAS THIS INTENTIONAL—OR JUST LUCK?

I wouldn't be able to answer you accurately unless I asked the creator, Kinoko Nasu about it. I don't think there is any particular reason why there are seven parts; the storyline just advanced down a path until it reached seven stories. Although, because seven is such a special number, it may not be a coincidence, either...

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE NUMBER?

It's seven! [laughs]

al



SHIKI



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MAIN SAILING Friendlier and less prone to scury than other pirates, Luffy (bottom) and crew return in unedited form.

ALL FOR ONE

Why you and every anime fan you know should be watching the pirates of 'One Piece'

By Rob Bricken

Just a little over a year ago, one of Japan's most popular anime series was nothing more than a shipwreck. In Japan, Eiichiro Oda's *One Piece* had broken manga sales records for over a decade, and the anime was approaching a decade of success as well. In America, *One Piece* was a disaster. Licensed by 4Kids Entertainment, the tale of Monkey D. Luffy and his quest to become king of the pirates had been bizarrely reimagined as a series for grade-schoolers, complete with inane rap songs, goofy voices and mind-bogglingly insulting edits to the original. The show limped through its timeslot on Adult Swim, and U.S. *One Piece* fans wept. And prayed.

FUNimation listened. The company took over the series, removing the crazy voices and edits and restoring the series' dignity. "The only cuts from this version come from Zoro's blade," affirms Lance Heiskell, FUNimation's marketing manager.

While on Cartoon Network, it's continuing from where 4Kids left off, FUNimation will release the first uncut, unedited *One Piece* DVD set (13 shiny episodes for \$49.98) on May 27, so old fans—and new ones—can see what they've been missing. What will they find? It's what any pirate wants: a buried treasure.

WARNING: *One Piece* has been airing in the States for years, so the following article contains what some would call "spoilers" and others would call "public knowledge." Read on at your own risk!

PIECE CORPS

Meet the crew members of the 'Going Merry'



MONKEY D. LUFFY The 17-year-old captain of the Straw Hat pirates is simple-minded and obsessed with meat. He's also rubber, having eaten the Gum Gum Fruit, which allows him to stretch his body to absurd lengths. He's determined to become king of the pirates, and his most treasured possession is the straw hat given to him by Red-Haired Shanks.



RORONOA ZORO This former pirate hunter turned first mate has one goal: to become the greatest swordsman in the world, in memory of his childhood friend Kuina. He uses a three-sword style: one sword in each hand, one in his mouth. He's only interested in fighting, training and napping.



NAMI The navigator is often the only person on the ship with any sense, except when it comes to money, as she's unbelievably greedy. A thief at heart, Nami's obsessed with treasure, but she's also an incredible sailor with uncanny weather-predicting abilities.



USOPP Although Usopp's dream is become a brave pirate like his father, he's a huge coward, although he can find courage at the last minute. His incredible slingshot skills have made him the ship's sharpshooter.



SANJI This chef is a formidable fighter, but he only attacks with his legs, lest his hands get damaged. His weakness is for the ladies, and he turns into a blithering idiot around Nami, Robin or any attractive girl. His dream is to find the legendary "All Blue," a sea where all the fish in the world can be found (so he can cook them).



TONY TONY CHOPPER A blue-nosed reindeer ate the Human Human Fruit, allowing him to talk and turn into a humanoid. He learned medicine from Dr. Hiriluk and Dr. Kureha, but created a Rumble Ball—a pill that allows him to have seven transformations—himself. He loves sweets and being complimented.

NICO ROBIN The former Miss All Sunday joined the Straw Hats after Luffy saved her life—against her will. She ate the Hana Hana Fruit, which allows her to sprout limbs (and other body parts) from any surface. She had a bounty of 33 million berries put on her head at the age of seven, as she's the last remaining person who can read the ancient Poneglyphs.



NICO ROBIN

THE PLOT THICKENS

The major story arcs of 'One Piece'



Marine captain Morgan at the same time.

MORGAN ARC

Luffy sets out to become the King of the Pirates, while lacking a ship or crew. He decides the pirate hunter Roronoa Zoro will be his first mate, and takes down the corrupt

ARLONG ARC

Luffy follows Nami to Cocoyashi island, where he learns that Nami is part of the Arlong Pirates, and that she's trying to acquire enough gold to buy back her captured island. Luffy and the Straw Hats free Cocoyashi and Nami joins for real.

WHISKEY PEAK ARC

After entering the Grand Line island chain, the Straw Hats' first stop is a town that seemingly welcomes pirates—but is in fact a front for the Baroque Works organization. Luffy and crew escape with Vivi, a princess of Alabasta, the country Baroque Works is plotting to overthrow.

BUGGY THE CLOWN ARC

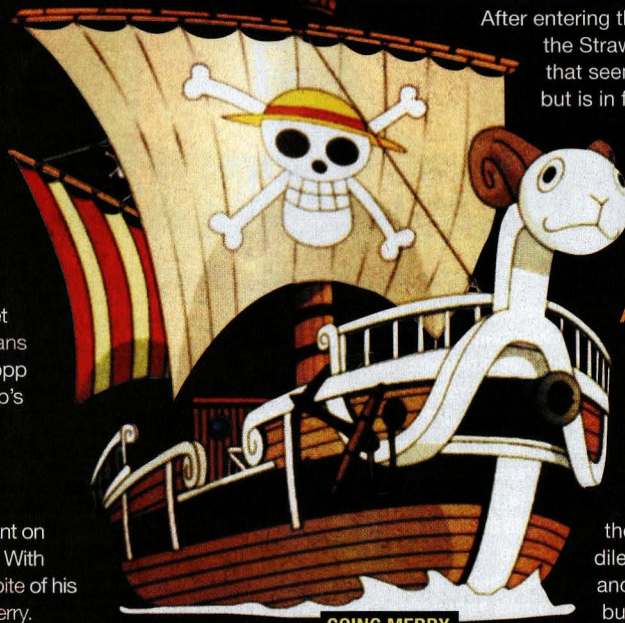
Luffy and Zoro meet Nami, who's on the run from the infamous Buggy the Clown, who can split his body apart with the Chop Chop Fruit. Luffy sends him flying, and Nami tentatively joins.

CAPTAIN KURO ARC

On a search for a real boat, Luffy and crew meet village liar Usopp while the evil Captain Kuro plans an attack on the town. The Straw Hats and Usopp repel Kuro and his Black Cat pirates, and Usopp's friend Kaya rewards them with a ship, the Going Merry.

DON KRIEG ARC

The Straw Hats land at Baratie, a floating restaurant on the sea, just as Don Krieg and his armada invade. With the help of the chef Sanji, Luffy pounds Krieg in spite of his treachery, but Nami disappears with the Going Merry.



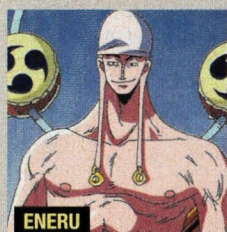
GOING MERRY

ALABASTA ARC

Luffy, Vivi and the crew arrive as Baroque Works' plan goes into action. Vivi tries desperately to stop the rebellion, while Luffy takes on BW leader Crocodile and the other Straw Hats face the elite BW agents. Crocodile's got sand powers, a bomb and hundreds of BW agents, but Luffy saves the day.

SKY HIGH

Everything you need to know about the currently airing 'Skypeia' arc



ENERU

Although the Knock-Up Stream propelled the *Going Merry* into the clouds, Skypeia is no heaven. The island is ruled by Eneru, whose lightning powers allow him to obliterate anyone in Skypeia instantly. Plus, the Skypeians are also under attack from the

Loftrians, another tribe which is trying to liberate its ancestral land (the only island in Skypeia made of Earth instead of clouds), which the Skypeians consider holy and took over centuries ago.

After befriending two Skypeians, Conis and her father Pagaya, along with former Skypeia ruler Gunfall, Luffy and crew realize that Skypeia is formerly a part of Jaya Island, sent into the sky by the Knock-Up Stream, and the legendary treasure reported by Mombran Noland must be here.

The Straw Hats decide to help defeat Eneru, but it won't be easy—not only because of Eneru's immense powers, but because of his four knights: Ohm, Satori, Gedatsu and Shura, all of whom have powers of their own. Then there's the Loftrians, led by the bazooka-wielding warrior Wyler, who plan on assaulting Eneru themselves and destroying anyone who gets in their way. There's also a giant snake, which has a habit of eating anyone in its path. Finally, Eneru's secret reason for taking over Skypeia will be revealed: when his project is finished, he plans on destroying all of Skypeia!



GUNFALL

GETTING ON BOARD

The other people in 'One Piece' you need to know

RED-HAIRED SHANKS This pirate inspired Luffy and gave up an arm to save the young boy from being eaten by a sea monster. He gave Luffy his straw hat, and made him promise to return it after he became a great pirate. He's still around, but what he's up to, no one knows.

BUGGY THE CLOWN Although Luffy's defeated him twice, this pirate has vowed vengeance and is still hunting Luffy. He's not powerful, but he can divide his body into pieces through the Chop Chop Fruit, and he once served with Shanks on Gold Roger's pirate ship.

PORTGAS D. ACE Luffy's brother Ace works for Whitebeard, the pirate closest to finding One Piece. Ace ate the Flame Flame Fruit, and can turn his body into and control fire. Whether Luffy and he are brothers by blood is uncertain. He's currently seeking Blackbeard on behalf of Whitebeard.

SMOKER Called "Chaser" in the TV version, this Marine captain ate the Plume Plume Fruit, which gives him control of smoke. He's been chasing Luffy since Loguetown, but let them go in Alabasta for saving the kingdom.

TASHIGI Smoker's lieutenant is an excellent swordswoman with a grudge against Zoro. She's also the spitting image of Zoro's dead friend Kuina, much to Zoro's consternation.

MARSHALL D. TEACH Better known as Blackbeard, Teach served on Whitebeard's ship before killing a crewmate. Whitebeard has sent Ace to punish him, but Blackbeard has his own Devil Fruit power...



TASHIGI

THREE FOR ALL

The three major powers that rule the seas of 'One Piece'

THE SEVEN WARLORDS OF THE SEA

Based on the privateers of Europe, these pirates have been hired by the World Government to fight other pirates. They are spectacularly powerful, and they've been pardoned for their crimes by consenting to work for the government. The current known members of the Seven Warlords are: Zoro's rival Dracule Mihawk, the world's greatest swordsman; Donquixote Doflamingo, who can control others' bodies with his Devil Fruit power; the huge and quiet Bartholomew Bear; a fishman named Jimbei, who hasn't been seen yet; and two unknown Warlords. Crocodile was a member, but was demoted for his crimes in Alabasta. Now Blackbeard hopes to take his place.

THE FIVE ELDER STARS Very little is known about this group, which controls the World Government and the Marines. They appear to know the secret of the Blank Century, and will do anything—no matter how terrible—to make sure it stays a secret.

THE FOUR EMPERORS They are the four most powerful pirates in the world of *One Piece*, and the reason the World Government created the Seven Warlords of the Sea. These pirates are not working together, but the idea of them joining forces terrifies the World Government. In the Japanese manga, two of the Four Emperors have been revealed.



CROCODILE

CUT TO PIECES

How 4Kids mauled 'One Piece,' and how FUNimation is putting it back together again



SANJI

When 4Kids Entertainment premiered the first episode of the English adaptation of *One Piece* in 2004, anime fans were shocked, and not in the good way. The opening music was replaced by an insipid rap song. All the music, in fact, was replaced by a goofy score that conveyed none of the majesty or adventure of the original.

Voices were done as cartoonishly as possible, with many characters given ridiculous regional accents, from Sanji's bizarre, Brooklyn-esque mumblings to Nico Robin's redneck drawl. Cigarettes and blood were digitally removed for the show's Saturday morning timeslot, naturally, but guns were preposterously replaced with water pistols and pop guns, with dialogue rewritten to try and make it all make sense.

FUNimation took over the *One Piece* license in 2007 with the promise of fixing all of these problems. FUNimation's TV broadcast returned the series' original music, stopped all edits (except for violence and smoking), and gave non-idiotic voices to all characters; the only continued alterations were of some character names. But this month's DVD release is totally uncut, and will cover the first 13 episodes, taking us through the Kuro Arc.

BY THE NUMBERS

Warning! Some spoilers lie ahead!

3 Main types of Devil Fruits: Zoan, which allows the body to transform into an animal (e.g. Chopper); Paramercia, which alters the body (e.g. Luffy); and Logia, which turns the body into an element (e.g. Smoker)

9 Movies, including this year's *Episode of Chopper: Bloom in the Winter, Miracle Sakura*

10 Members of the Straw Hat pirates currently in the Japanese manga, including cyborg shipwright Franky and undead musician Brooke

24 Languages *One Piece* is published in

49 Manga volumes of *One Piece* in Japan (seven more than all of *Dragon Ball*) so far

50 Percent of the Grand Line the Straw Hats have sailed in the Japanese manga

350 Episodes aired in Japan as of press time

2,630,000 Copies of *One Piece* Vol. 25 sold, the highest-selling manga volume in Japan ever

140,000,000 *One Piece* manga volumes sold in Japan total

700,000,000 Combined berry bounty of the Straw Hat Pirates in the Japanese manga

PIECE BY PIECE

The 'One Piece' mysteries to keep in mind

THE BLANK CENTURY 800 years ago, a great civilization disappeared; no record remains of that entire century except the Poneglyphs, written in a language that's illegal to know by order of the World Government. No one can say why the civilization disappeared or why the government is hiding the truth.

THE ANCIENT WEAPONS Besides the Blank Century, the Poneglyphs tell of unspeakably powerful ancient weapons; the villainous Crocodile tried to conquer Alabasta just to get his hands on one. Two such weapons have been named so far—Pluton and Poseidon—but what they are and what they do is unknown.

DRAGON This man with the tattooed face seemed to free Luffy in Loguetown by summoning a storm. He's a known criminal, but his connection to Luffy—and what he's doing—isn't going to be revealed until volume 45 of the manga.

D Luffy's full middle name is also unknown, but Chopper's mentor, Dr. Kureha, reveals that he shares it with Gold Roger, whose real name is Gol D. Roger. She calls it "the will of D." Although its importance is unclear, more Ds will be revealed in *One Piece* over the next few manga volumes and anime episodes.

ONE PIECE

The famous buccaneer Gold Roger's treasure sparked the great age of piracy, and only by finding it will someone become king of the pirates. However, no one appears to know what or where it is. Most assume that it's located on Raftel, the last island on the Grand Line.

at

Rob Bricken lies awake some nights, worrying that Eiichiro Oda will be hit by a truck before he completes One Piece. Look both ways, Oda!



GOLD ROGER



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LET THERE BE LIGHT The quirky detective L (right) has passed away, but Light (above) remains relentless in his quest to cleanse the world.

UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

As the hunt for Kira heats up in 'Death Note,' who will Light face on his path to world domination?

Take two young masterminds matching wits with the fate of thousands of lives on the line, toss in a serving of a cute, bouncy idol wielding the power to condemn bad reviewers to an early grave and stir in a heaping bowlful of world governments, criminal organizations and mega-corporations, all bowing to the power of one little notebook. With this blend of colorful characters and mind-bending plot twists, it's easy to see why *Death Note*'s popularity has become such a world-wide phenomenon. When high school student Light Yagami picked up a fallen death note, tool of a shinigami and an unbelievably powerful item with the ability to kill anyone if their name is written in its pages, he was just an average teenager. Months later,

he's on the verge of becoming the self-proclaimed god of a new society.

The quest for Kira, the name given to the anonymous individual responsible for the deaths of countless criminals judged unworthy, has been burning up the airwaves since the anime premiered on Adult Swim last year, and it's already claimed one key life: famed detective L ultimately failed to bring Kira to justice. Now that Light is on the verge of total victory, it's time for him to be more careful than ever, as everything he's worked for is on the line. And he should be—although L is gone, two would-be successors are still gunning for Kira, and they're not the only ones he should worry about. Sooner or later, someone's going to bring Light to justice—but who?

BY JOE CHAN



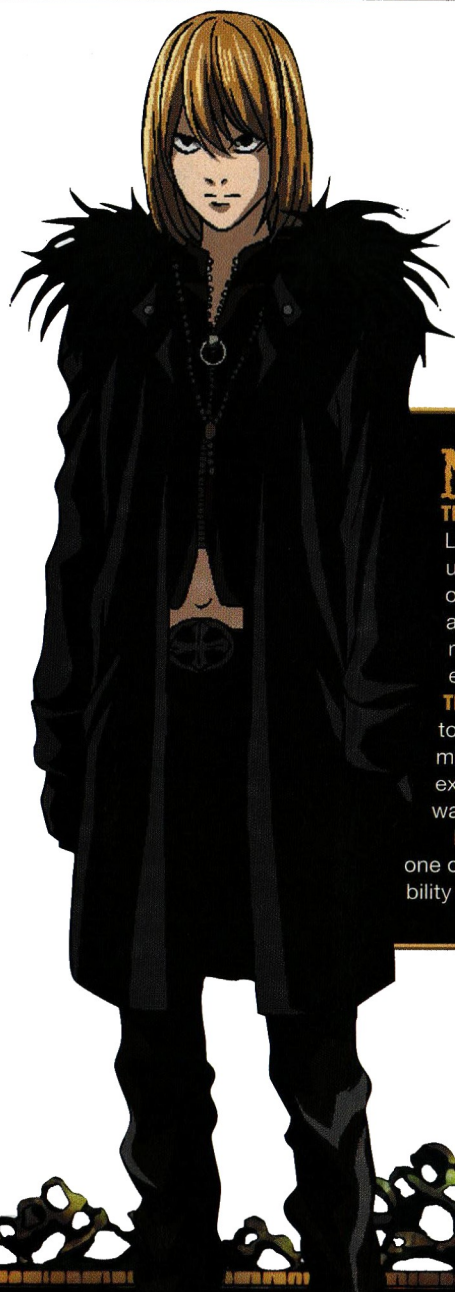
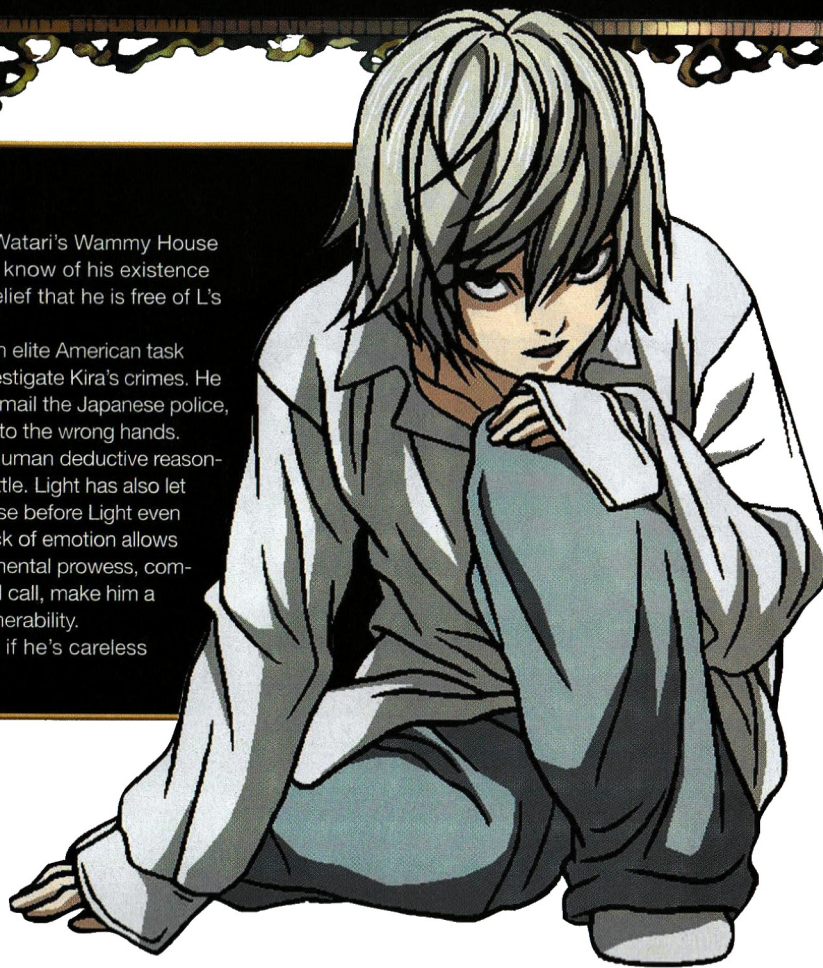
NEAR

THE ROLE: Near is one of two gifted children raised at Watari's Wammy House as one of L's potential successors. Light doesn't even know of his existence until he shows up out of the blue, shattering Light's belief that he is free of L's influence.

He soon discovers that Near is the young leader of an elite American task force, the Special Provision for Kira (SPK), formed to investigate Kira's crimes. He uses the immense resources at his disposal first to blackmail the Japanese police, and later to help them keep the death note from falling into the wrong hands.

THE FOIL: Near possesses the same level of nearly superhuman deductive reasoning that Light and L displayed in their cat-and-mouse battle. Light has also let his guard down since L's defeat, allowing Near to get close before Light even realizes what's happening. His preternatural calm and lack of emotion allows him methodical efficiency in thoughts and actions. This mental prowess, combined with the professional power he has at his beck and call, make him a formidable opponent who will exploit even the tiniest vulnerability.

Light will have his hands full dealing with him, and if he's careless for even a single moment, his life is forfeit.



MELLO

THE ROLE: Mello is the other child genius who was raised to follow in L's footsteps. Like Near, his ability and training were maintained in utmost secrecy, but where Near is willing to negotiate for the release of the death note, Mello's methods are much more aggressive. He allies himself with the mafia, targets people closest to the original members of the Japanese police's Kira task force and devises an elaborate plan to obtain the death note for himself.

THE FOIL: Mello is as interested in winning as he is in justice; he wants to prove he's the most worthy to be L's successor, and he's determined to reach that goal by any means necessary. Unlike Near, he is excitable and ruthless, and won't hesitate to kill anyone standing in his way, if it comes to that.

Light's biggest problem is that in a moment of weakness, he allows one of the death notes to fall into Mello's hands, and there's every possibility that Mello will show his similarity to Kira and write a name down.

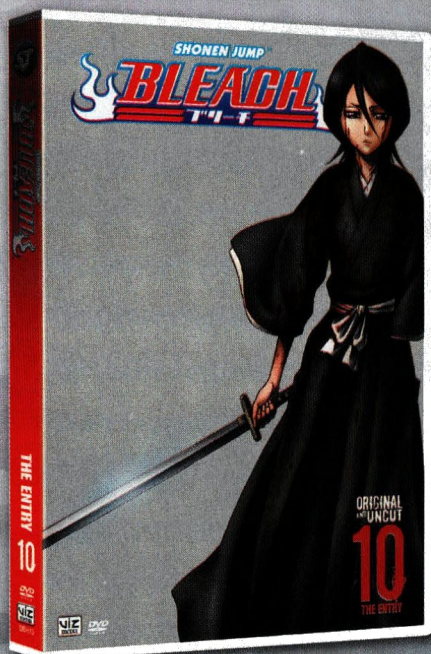
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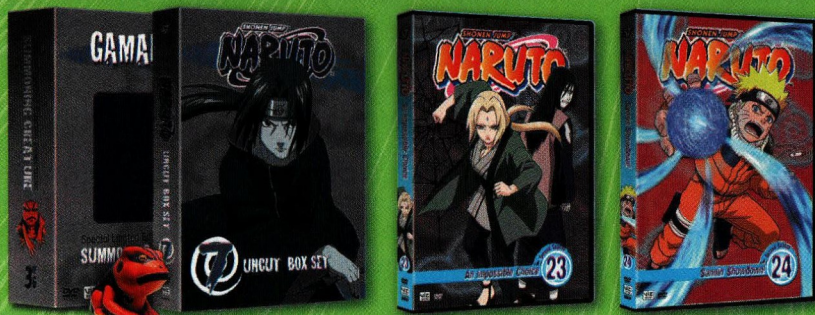
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SAVE RUKIA
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE?



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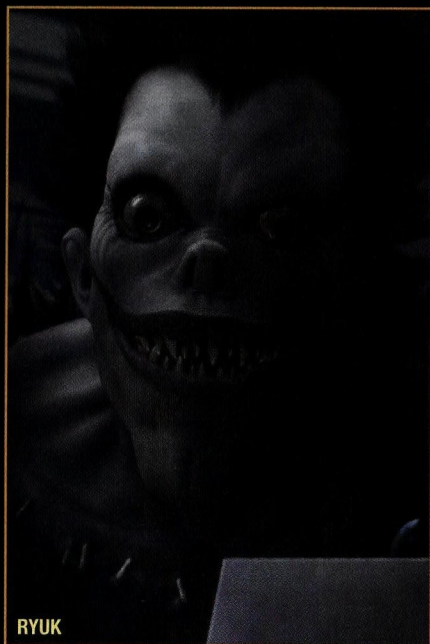
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THE BIG PICTURE

'Death Note' and the continuing movie series it inspired



RYUK

In addition to the immensely popular manga and anime, *Death Note* has appeared in several other forms of media, most notably the live-action films. The first two, *Death Note* and *Death Note: The Last Name*, both came out in 2006 and more or less follow the events of the manga with a few details altered, including the ending. Both were directed by Shusuke Kaneko, and starred Tatsuya Fujiwara (*Battle Royale*) as Light and Ken'ichi Matsuyama (*NANA*) as L. Also notable is Takeshi Kaga, better known as *Iron Chef's* Chairman Kaga, as Light's father Soichiro. Both films have been licensed by VIZ Pictures.

The third film, *L: Change the World*, is a spinoff of the *Death Note* movies. Though L is featured as the film's protagonist, the story has little to do with official *Death Note* continuity. It's directed by Hideo Nakata (*Ringu*) with Matsuyama reprising his role as the title character.

Fans can also get their *Death Note* fix in the form of videogames and novels, too—at least in Japan. Three Nintendo DS games have been released, as well as a novel detailing an investigation that Naomi Misora worked on with L, which was mentioned early on in *Death Note*. As great a detective as L was, who knows how many stories of his life have yet to be told?

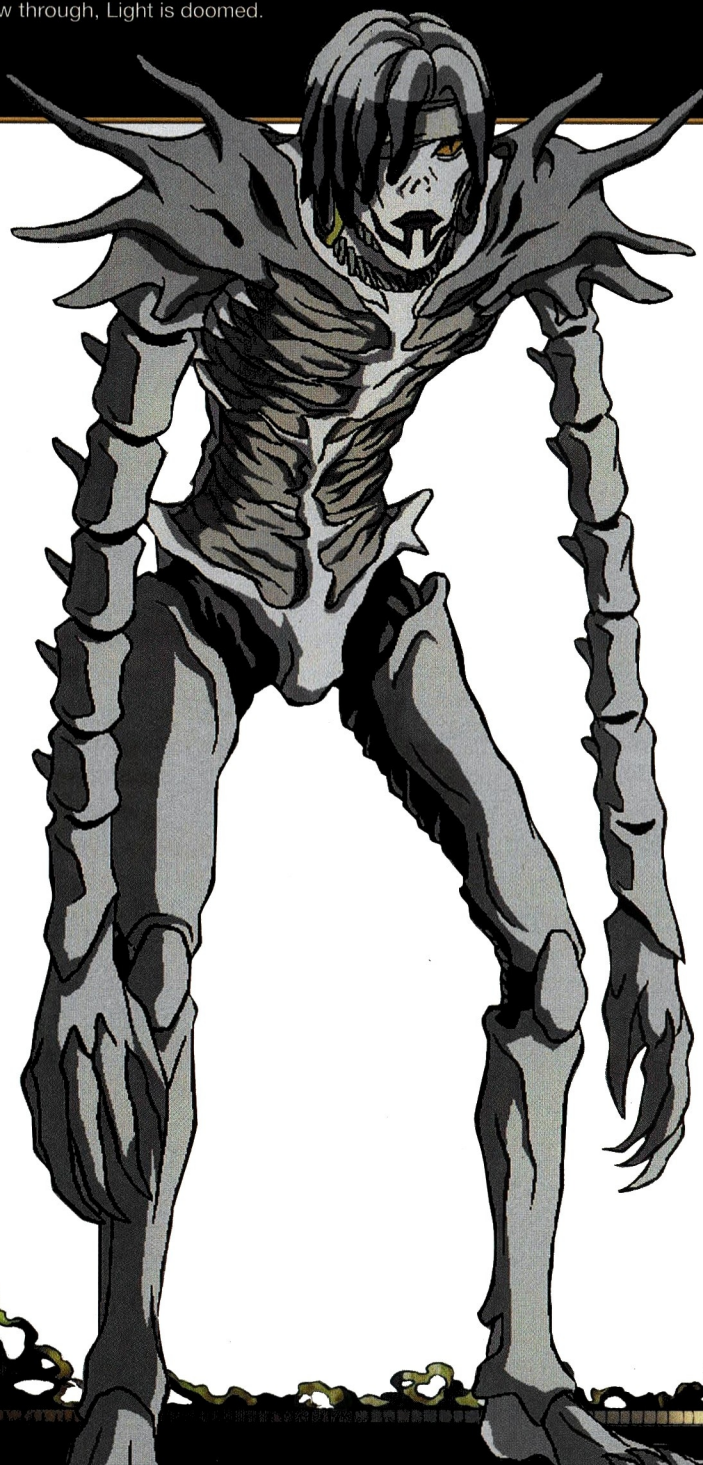
REM

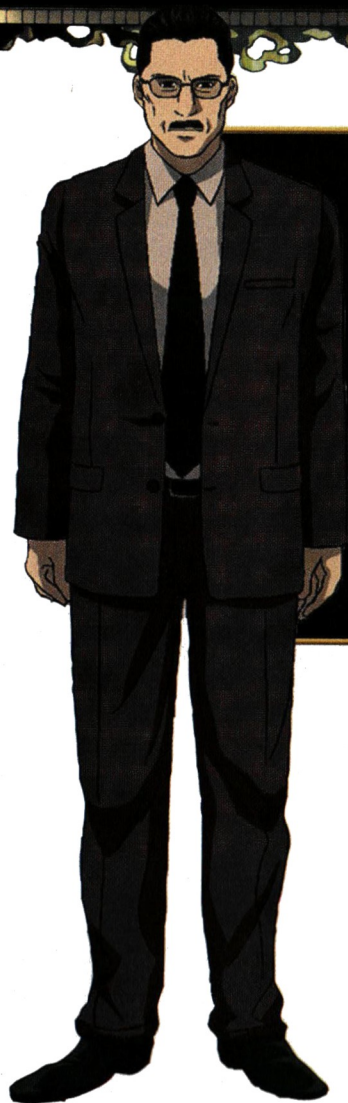
THE ROLE: Rem is the shinigami who took ownership of a second death note after another death god forfeited his life to save Misa Amane. She is also the one responsible for giving Misa that notebook and for performing the trade that grants Misa the "shinigami eyes," which allow her to see anyone's true name and lifespan.

A reluctant pawn to Light's machinations, Rem only remains because she, too, has come to love Misa. She harbors resentment toward Light's actions, but is unwilling to take action against him because she knows that would only hurt Misa.

THE FOIL: As a shinigami, Rem has the power to end Light's life at any time. However, because of her attachment to Misa and her devotion to ensuring Misa's happiness, she allows Light to use her in his schemes. She has stated, however, that she will not hesitate to kill Light if she thinks he will hurt Misa in any way.

Light's plans for Rem are far more important than she realizes, though. He manipulates the situation and puts himself and Misa in danger of being uncovered as Kira, and gambles on Rem's loyalty to see them through. This could bring great rewards, but if she doesn't follow through, Light is doomed.





SOICHIRO YAGAMI AND THE NPA

THE ROLE: Light's father, Soichiro is an officer in the National Police Agency of Japan (the NPA.) After L deduces that Kira lives in Japan, the International Police Organization (IPO) meets with NPA to create a joint task force to investigate Kira's crimes, and Soichiro unwittingly participates in hunting down his own son. The group is sworn to absolute secrecy about their actions and L's identity, but so far, Light has managed to obtain enough information to stay ahead of them every step of the way.

THE FOIL: Life would be so much easier for Light if the police were just faceless obstacles on his way toward world domination. Unfortunately, his father is named as chief of the joint investigative unit formed between the IPO and the NPA. Light displays an uncharacteristic reluctance to harm anyone in his family, even if they threaten his role as Kira, and allows the members of the joint task force to live even as he ruthlessly disposes of 12 FBI agents sent to investigate him. They're just ordinary good cops, but could Light's weakness for his family be their key to making an arrest?

RYUK

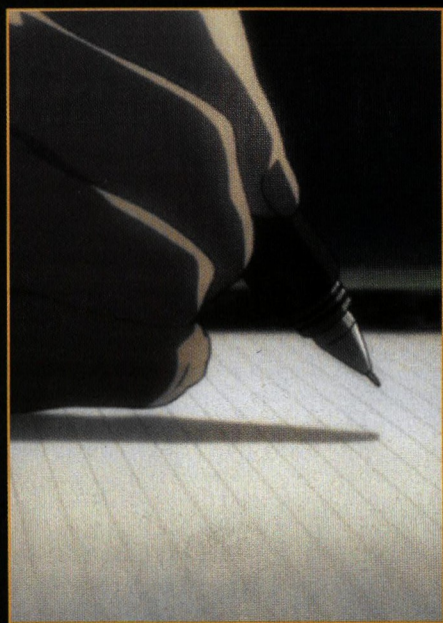
THE ROLE: Ryuk is the shinigami who, thanks to a bout of boredom, stole a death note and dropped it in the hopes that someone interesting would pick it up. Lucky for him, Light is the one who came across the notebook, and thus began his megalomaniacal journey towards a crime-free world. Ryuk generally appears as an impartial observer, though he is willing to help out and even perform menial tasks for Light when bribed with a juicy apple.

THE FOIL: Ryuk never displays anything resembling loyalty to Light. At best, he's willing to lend a hand for his own amusement. As a shinigami, he has the power to put Light out of his misery at any time, and if Ryuk didn't enjoy watching humanity's follies so much, he probably would have done it a long time ago. To stay alive, Light has to be able to keep his deception going and entertain Ryuk enough—as well as maintain a steady supply of apples—to keep himself out of the morgue.



BY ANY OTHER NAME

The importance of identity in
'Death Note' and real life



There are numerous beliefs across many different cultures, philosophies, folklore and religion where the knowledge of someone's "true name" grants you power. Names are considered to represent a person's identity and being. By controlling the knowledge of that name, you control that person; and by granting a name to an object, you give it existence. This is not an uncommon idea, as it is expressed in some form even in Christianity and Judaism.

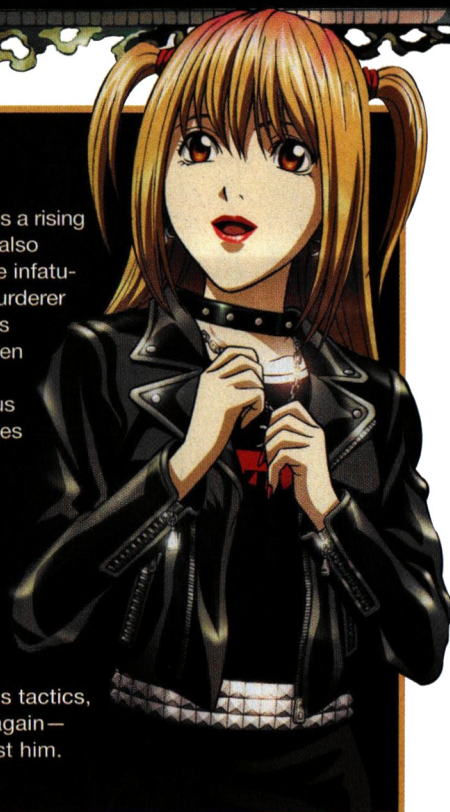
In some cultures, people kept two names: one that they shared with others for casual use and the other, their true name, kept secret. In others, people would change their name throughout life to reflect the person they became. There is also the belief that names are tied to a person's fate. The practice of nomancy, for example, is a form of divination using a person's name.

Unsurprisingly, this idea appears in many works of fiction as well, including *Death Note*. It's not enough for a death note user to know who they want to kill; they must know that person's full given name, that intimate term for who they really are, in order to use the notebook to control that person's ultimate destiny, deciding when and how they die.

MISA AMANE

THE ROLE: Misa-Misa, as she refers to herself, is a rising fashion model, actress, idol and singer who also moonlights as Kira number two. She became infatuated with Kira when he killed her parents' murderer after a legal slip-up let him go free. She gains ownership of a death note from Rem, and then trades half her remaining lifetime for the shinigami eyes, giving herself a tactical bonus that Light lacks. Through a series of messages to Kira and her own investigative work, she discovers Kira's true identity, declares her love and forcefully attaches herself to him.

THE FOIL: Misa's shinigami eyes prove very useful to Light, but Misa herself is flighty and impetuous. She is exceedingly loyal to Kira and his cause, however, and will do anything for him, which Light takes advantage of by having her perform much of his dirty work for a while. But without his genius tactics, Misa's mistakes could risk exposing Light again—or she could use her own death note against him.



LIGHT YAGAMI

THE ROLE: Light Yagami inherited the first of the death-dealing notebooks and used it to mete his own brand of justice to the world's criminals. His acts are meticulously planned, and his vision of a peaceful Earth leaves only him standing on top of the world as a living god.

Light is a brilliant tactician, and his powers of deduction impressed even L. He exploits his father's rank and position within the NPA to infiltrate the Kira investigation team and operates in the safest place imaginable—right under their very noses.

THE FOIL: Light is a smart guy, but he might be too smart for his own good. He knows that there are many who disagree with his ways, and he can't trust anyone enough to fully let them in on his plans. Though he has a number of followers completely devoted to him, he is only willing to use them as tools, rather than allies. If his excessive paranoia isn't what leads to his undoing, then it may be his pride and ego that blind him to his own end.



L

THE ROLE: The enigmatic L was known as the world's most brilliant detective, as well as the second and third via fake identities. Brought in to help the NPA close the Kira case, he and Light worked to defeat each other throughout most of the series. He came close to declaring Light to be Kira multiple times, but each time Light managed to cast doubt on L's theories and eventually coerced Rem into writing down L's name, killing him.

THE FOIL: Light didn't account for the extensive series of backup plans that L and Watari set up in the event that something happened to them. L was no slouch when it came to strategic planning and Watari had the resources to back him up, so they prepared measures that would notify the Wammy House when it was time to set L's successors loose on the world. Light is plenty familiar with L's extreme tenacity, and there might be more surprises in store. L could finally be responsible for bringing down Kira even after his death.



SAYU YAGAMI

THE ROLE: Sayu is Light's innocent and unassuming younger sister. She cheers him on when she learns that he and Misa are seeing each other and encourages the two to get married later on. As the years pass, she eventually gets caught up in one of the many plots to gain ownership of a death note, and her life changes forever.

THE FOIL: Not only is she the daughter of a notable police officer, but she is also the sister of the genius Light and could be keeping incredible abilities of her own secret from her brother. Sayu could be the one that provides the vital clue that finally brings all the pieces together, leading to the capture of the elusive Kira.

You never know.

ai

Ultimate Yuzu

One girl lands a mountain of riches, hot guys and all the headaches that come with them

Some shojo heroines have it tough, struggling with debilitating illnesses or tragic secrets. Yuzu Yamashita, however, goes from being homeless to living in a mansion stocked with uncommonly hot and eligible young men. Poor her.

But there's more to Yuzu's change of fortune. After her mother's death, she's whisked away to an opulent estate by her grandmother's assistant (and possibly more) Hassaku, and finds herself groomed to inherit the family's wealth.

Takako Shigematsu (*Tenshi Ja Nai!*) pulls the familiar tactic of surrounding a plucky female lead with desirable suitors, but *Ultimate Yuzu* isn't just a romance. Yuzu's headstrong, and she's soon locked in a war of wills with her grandmother.

The battle starts May 1, and we've scored a preview of Yuzu's rags-to-riches story.

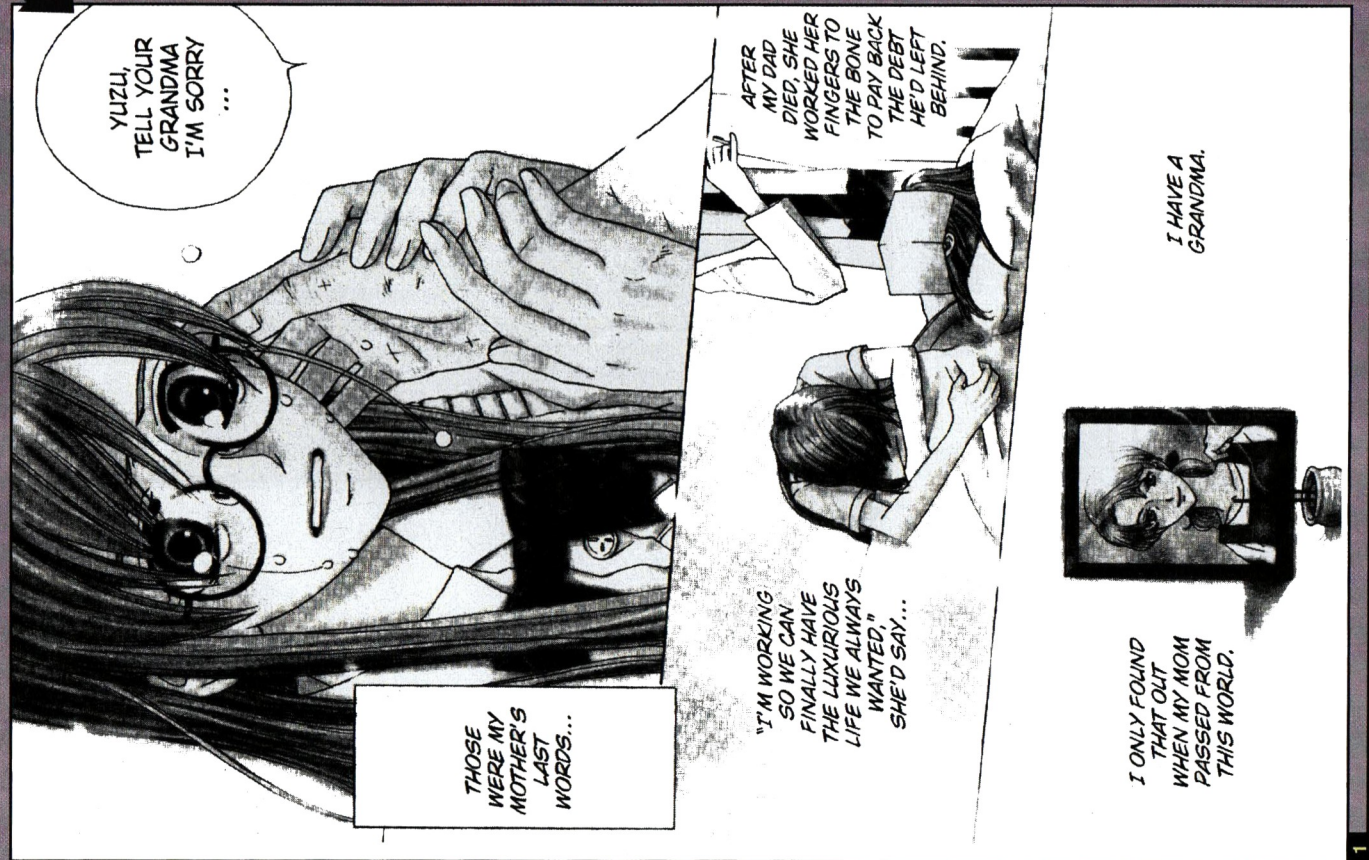
■ Todd Ciolek

IN THESE PAGES...

Yuzu's debt-ridden father and hard-working mother have passed away, making her a vagrant. But it seems her mother was keeping a few things from Yuzu, and the secrets begin with a little revelation about the identity of Yuzu's long-lost grandmother.

The 2	Read 1
Pages 3	
Way 5	This 4

START HERE



YUZU,
TELL YOUR
GRANDMA
I'M SORRY
...

THOSE
WERE MY
MOTHER'S
LAST
WORDS...

"I'M WORKING
SO WE CAN
FINALLY HAVE
THE LUXURIOUS
LIFE WE ALWAYS
WANTED,"
SHE'D SAY...

AFTER
MY DAD
DIED, SHE
WORKED HER
FINGERS TO
THE BONE
TO PAY BACK
THE DEBT
HE'D LEFT
BEHIND.



I ONLY FOUND
THAT OUT
WHEN MY MOM
PASSED FROM
THIS WORLD.

I HAVE A
GRANDMA.

CONTINUE
HERE

READ RIGHT TO LEFT



ultimate
VENUS

究極の一寸
EPISODE*1

I CAN HEAR YOU!!

I'M SAYING IT SO YOU CAN!!

SHE NEEDS TO BE PATIENT ABOUT THE RENOVATION COSTS!

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT MISERLY GRANNY OF A LAND-LADY!!

YUZU-CHAN.

THIS APARTMENT'S FILLED WITH MEMORIES OF MY MOM. I WANT TO COME BACK AND LIVE HERE, SOME DAY.

SAYING I HAD A FRIEND TO STAY WITH...

...WAS A LIE.

BUT...

WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY.

I'LL MANAGE!

DON'T WORRY. I'LL GET A PAYCHECK FROM MY PART-TIME JOB, SOON.

YUZU-CHAN, DO YOU HAVE A PLACE TO GO?

BUT...

BESIDES, YOUR BOY-FRIEND'S COMING BACK FROM HIS BUSINESS TRIP TONIGHT, ISN'T HE?

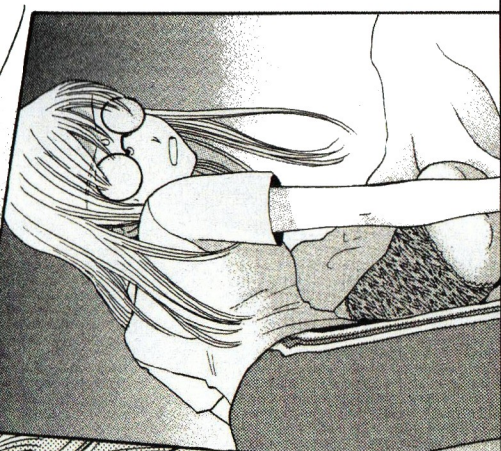
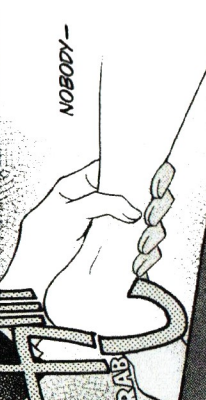
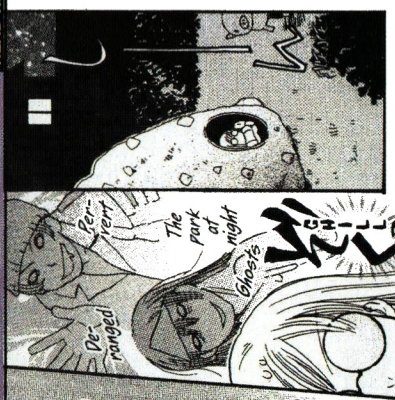
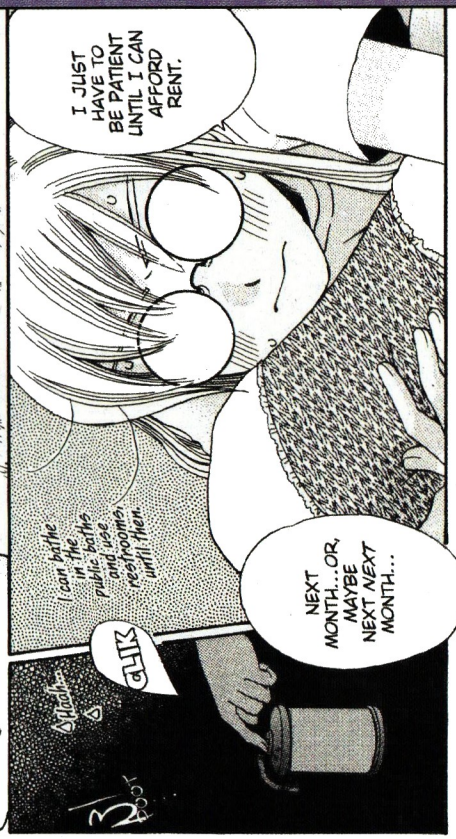
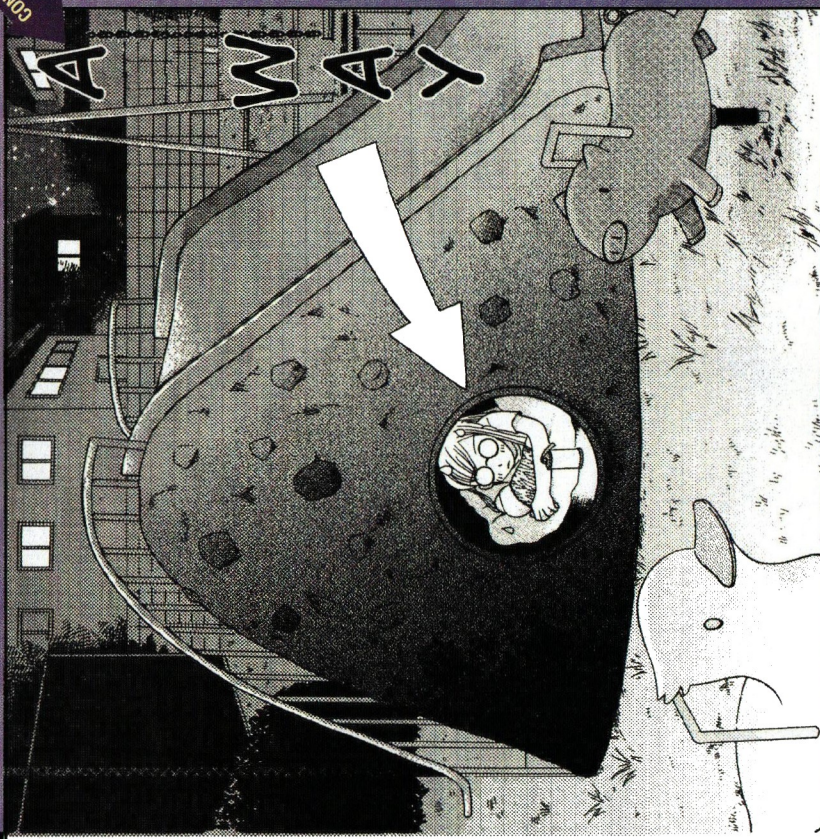
I DON'T WANT TO INTRUDE.

YOU CAN ALWAYS STAY AT MY PLACE. DON'T BE SO SHY...

BUT, I'VE ALREADY IMPOSED ON YOU FOR THREE DAYS...

UNTIL THEN, I'VE GOT A FRIEND I CAN STAY WITH, UNTIL I EARN THE MONEY I NEED.

I'LL BE FINE! I SWEAR I'LL COME BACK AS YOUR NEIGHBOR!





MY
HUMBLEST
REGARDS.



TH-
THIS
GUY...



...IS BAD
NEWS!!

Oh, thank
you very
much!
You know
what?

I REMEMBER
RULE #23 OF
MY MOTHER'S
LOVE &
TEACHINGS.



HUH?

I MAY
NOT
LOOK IT,
BUT I'M
REALLY A
DUDE!

YOU'RE
YUZU
YAMASHITA-
SAMA,
CORRECT?

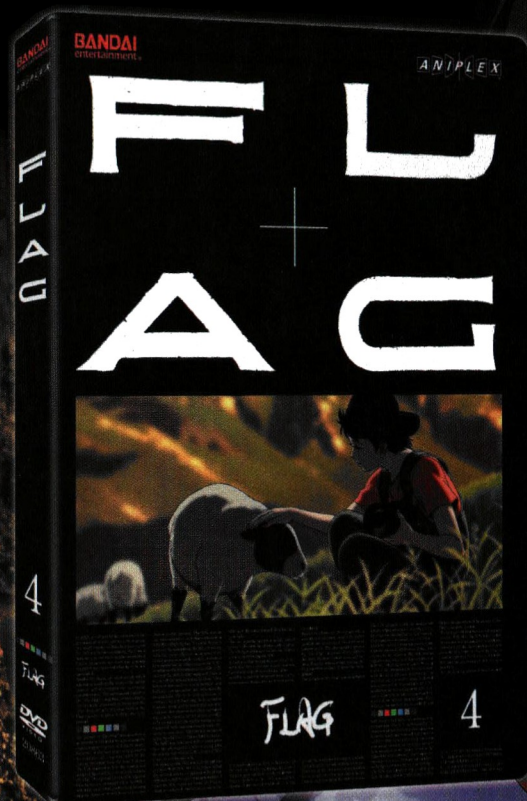
I...I
DON'T
HAVE
ANY
MONEY!!



MY
NAME IS
HAS-
HAS-
SAKU
KAGAMI.

YOUR GRAND-
MOTHER SENT
ME TO LOOK
FOR YOU.

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WHAT'S SHE LIKE, I WONDER ...

AND WHY HAVEN'T I EVER MET HER?

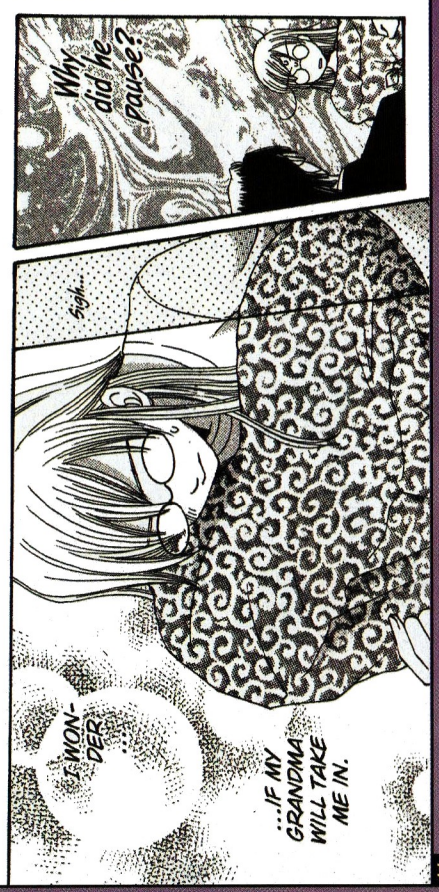
MY GRANDMA ...



YOU'LL KNOW WHEN YOU MEET HER.

UM, EXCUSE ME...?

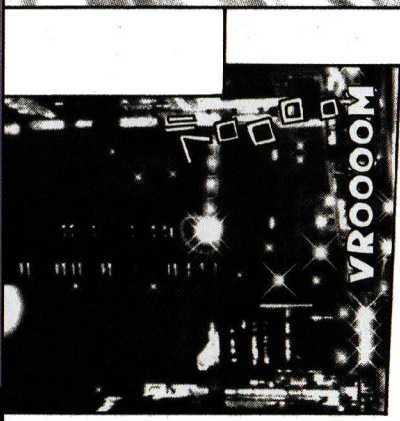
CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT MY GRAND-MA'S LIKE?



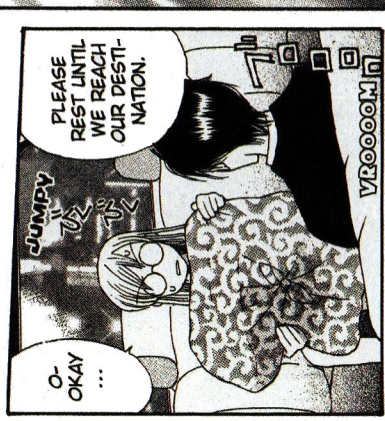
...IF MY GRANDMA WILL TAKE ME IN.

Sigh...

Why did he pause?



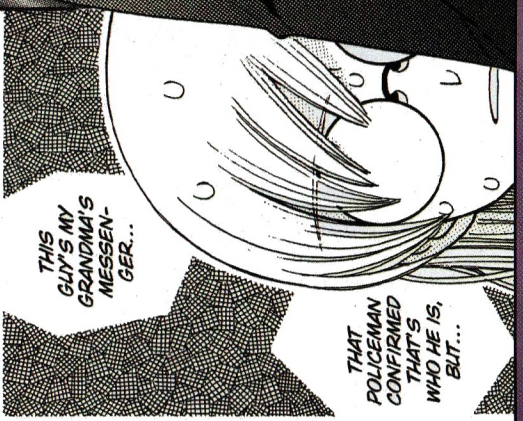
VROOOOM



PLEASE REST UNTIL WE REACH OUR DESTINATION.

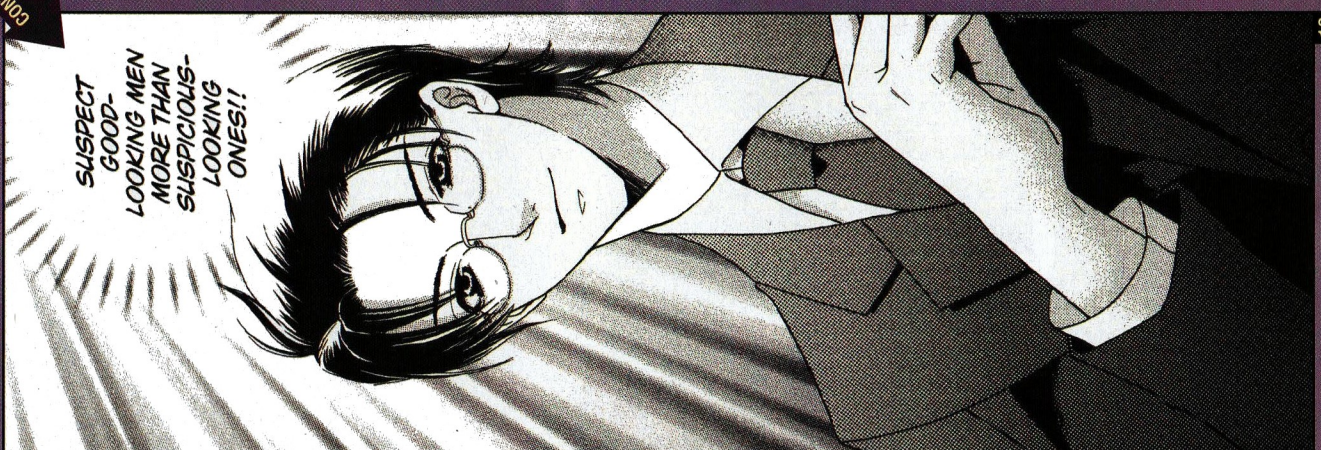
O-KAY ...

VROOOOM

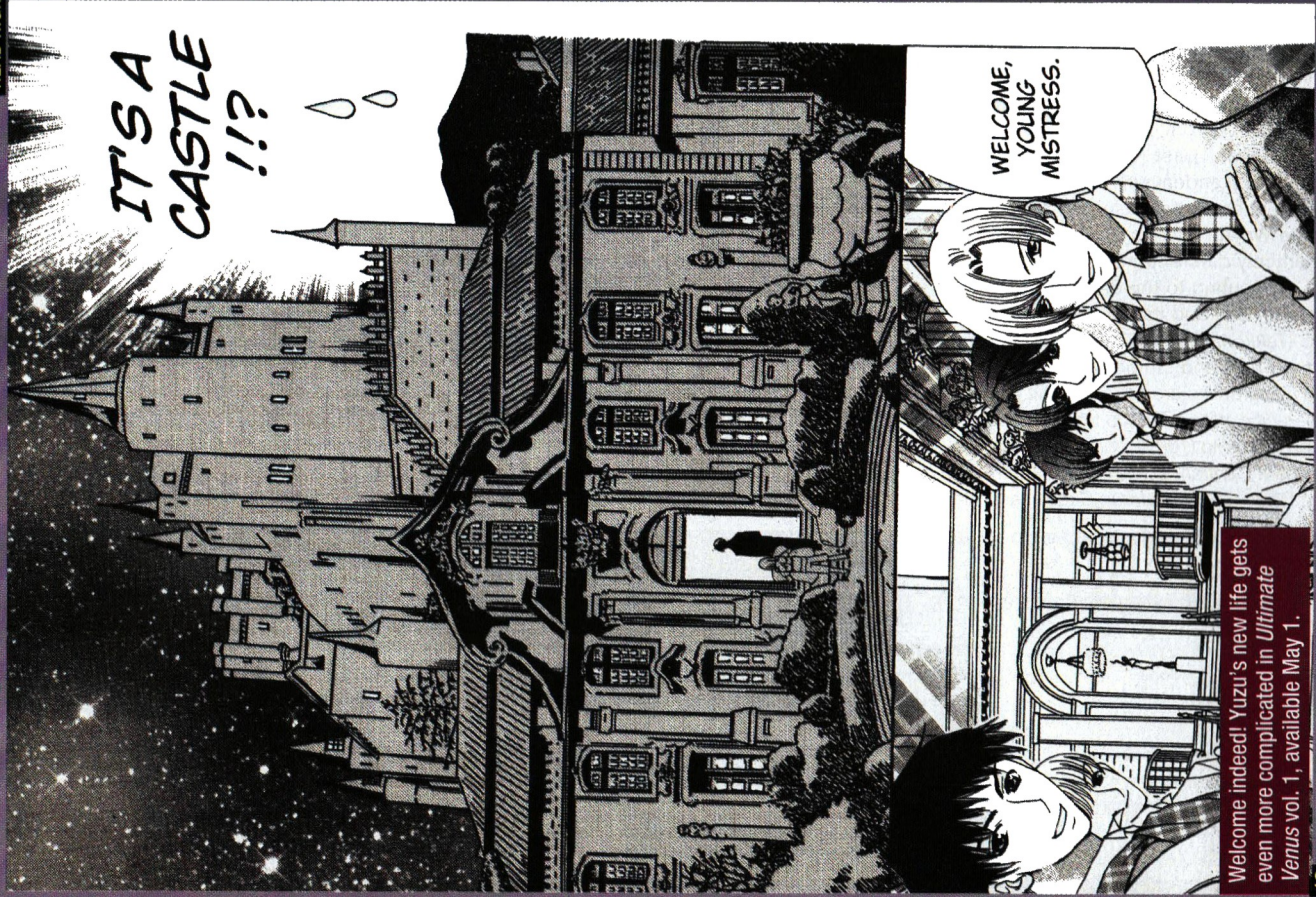


THIS GUY'S MY GRANDMA'S MESSENGER...

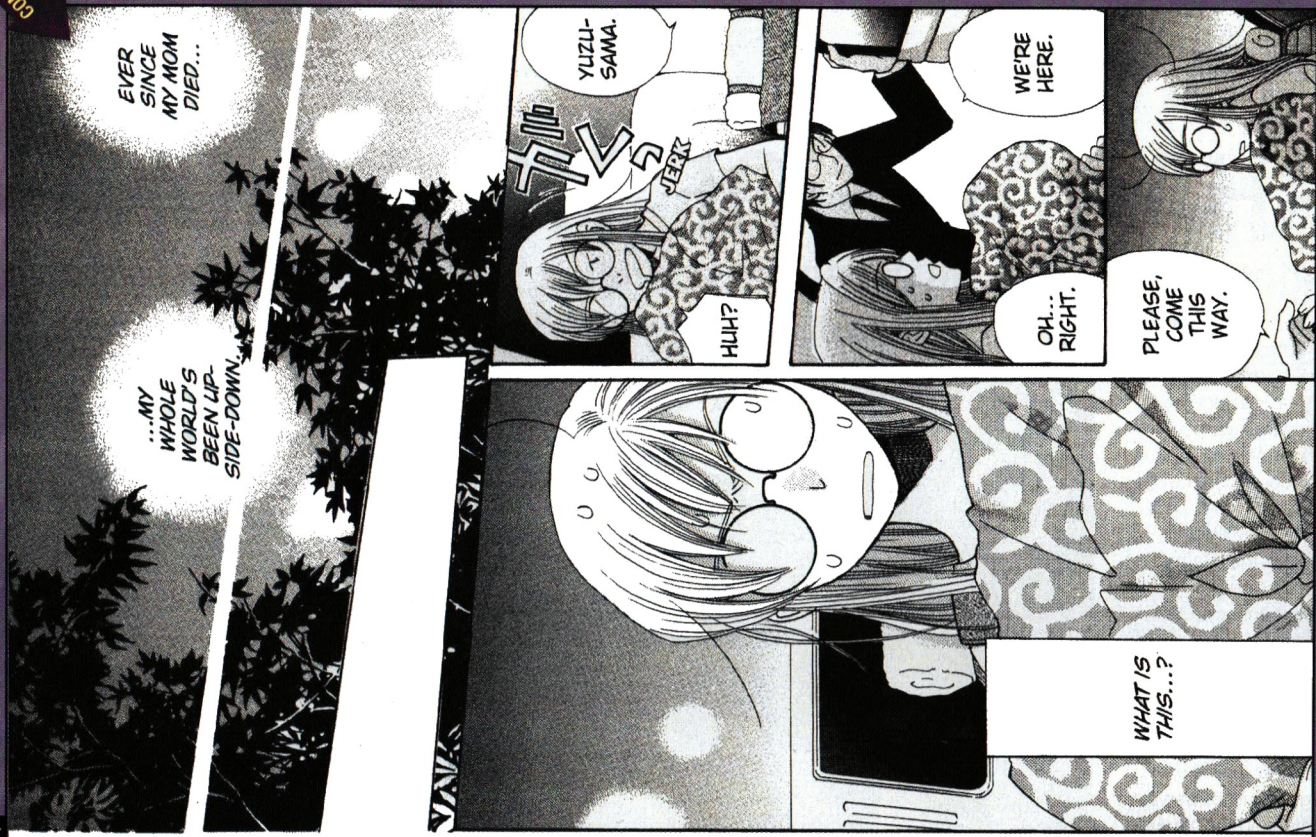
THAT POLICEMAN CONFIRMED THAT'S WHO HE IS, BUT...



SUSPECT GOOD-LOOKING MEN MORE THAN SUSPICIOUS-LOOKING ONES!!



Welcome indeed! Yuzu's new life gets even more complicated in *Ultimate Venus* vol. 1, available May 1.



SHADOWS OF THE KNIGHT

Batman hits DVD with Japanese-animated 'Gotham Knight' special

He is vengeance, he is the night and, depending on who's designing his action figures, he can also breathe in space. With countless movies and television shows under his utility belt, it appears that Batman's been in everything except anime—until now. As part of a tie-in with this summer's *The Dark Knight*, the direct-to-DVD *Batman: Gotham Knight* will bridge the gap between *Batman Begins* and its sequel, and several top anime studios and directors are in on it.

The list of creative minds behind *Gotham Knight* is a who's-who in the worlds of *Batman* and anime. Taking a cue from Warner Bros.' past

U.S./Japan endeavor, *The Animatrix*, the new release contains six short films about Bruce Wayne and his alter ego, each with an entirely different creative team behind it. Contributing to the dark landscape of Gotham City and its inhabitants are studio 4°C (*Tekkunkinkreet*), Production I.G (*Ghost in the Shell*) and studio Madhouse (*Paprika*).

Writing duties are based on the this side of the Pacific, with offerings from comics writers Brian Azzarello (*100 Bullets*) and Greg Rucka (*Gotham Central*), screenwriters Josh Olson and David Goyer (*Batman Begins*) and Alan



THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS Batman's still new to the crimefighting business in *Gotham Knight*, but he can strike plenty of fear in the hearts of evildoers.

Burnett, former writer for cartoon classic *Batman: The Animated Series*. And who would be better suited to supervise and produce than Bruce Timm, co-creator of *Batman: TAS* and the spin-offs that eventually became the DC animated universe? Even the voice of *TAS* Batman is back, as Kevin Conroy reprises his role as the brooding vigilante in at least one of the shorts.

Major details about the six stories on the DVD have been kept under wraps, but familiar villains from Batman's rogues gallery will be included. We'll find out what happened to the Scarecrow after the credits rolled on *Batman*

Begins, and Batman will spend some quality time wrestling gators in the sewers—more specifically, Killer Croc. Ace assassin Deadshot also makes an appearance and it's up to the world's greatest detective to shake his aim.

Expect to get a close up look at the technological wonders that make up Batman's anti-criminal arsenal, see areas of Gotham City that you've never seen before and explore Batman's continued early training, all through the artistic interpretation of some of Japan's best animation teams. *Gotham Knight* arrives on July 8, and it's something both comic and anime fans should line up for. ■ *Megan Rebuck*

TURNING JAPANESE

Three more U.S. properties that got a Japanese spin

POWERPUFF GIRLS Z

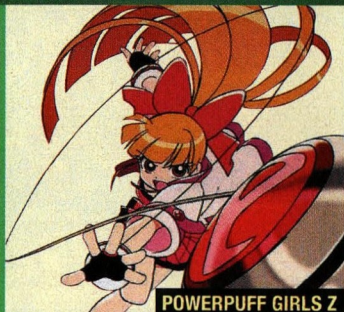
The anime version of the toughest, cutest girls around gave Professor Untonium a son, Ken, who used Chemical Z on a mysterious glacier only to find the Powerpuff Girls inside. The girls guard Tokyo instead of Townsville, and they're not kindergarteners—they're precocious teenagers.

SPIDER-MAN

Your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man transferred to Japan and kept his costume, but just about everything else changed. This 1978 live-action series had a distinctly sentai flair. Instead of nabbing criminals, Spidey fought giant monsters in cheap rubber suits—often with his giant mecha, Leopardon.

THE ANIMATRIX

The nine animated shorts in this DVD fit in continuity with the *Matrix* trilogy, revealing a more detailed history of Neo's world as well as events separate from the films. Multiple anime directors and studios contributed, including Shinichiro Watanabe (*Cowboy Bebop*) and Studio 4°C (*Twenty Witches*).  Angela Hanson



LETHAL WEAPONS

FUNimation snags the monster-mashing 'Claymore' series

Monsters beware: the warrior women are coming for you. FUNimation recently announced its license of the 26-episode *Claymore*, a medieval fantasy series about a young half-human, half-demon woman who slays monsters called yoma.

Armed with a huge sword called a claymore, Clare is part of a secret organization that creates super-strong human/yoma hybrids to protect ordinary people from the sentient creatures who would devour them. Warriors like Clare have become known as Claymores, after their weapons, and despite the help they give to humans, they find themselves feared and ostracized. The all-female warriors share pale hair, silver eyes and the ability to release *yoki*, or the power of their yoma-halves. But should a Claymore push her yoma power to its limits, she will become a bloodthirsty monster herself.

"Every year we strive to release at least one awesome action show," said FUNimation's marketing manager Lance Heiskell. "We hit the jackpot in 2008."

Based on the original manga by Norihiro Yagi, available from VIZ Media, *Claymore* is directed by Hiroyuki Tanaka (*Ninja Scroll*), with animation provided by studio Madhouse. ■ Carolyn Fowlkes



CLARE

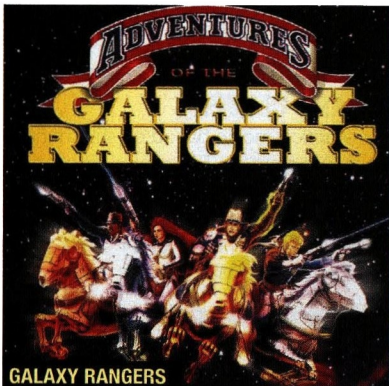
ACROSS THE GALAXY

'The Adventures of the Galaxy Rangers' finally gets its own DVD set

The Adventures of the Galaxy Rangers takes place in the year 2086, but you won't have to wait that long to see it; on May 13, the first 32 episodes of the classic series arrive in a box set from Koch Vision.

Originally running from 1986 to 1989, *The Adventures of the Galaxy Rangers* was an American cartoon with major anime connections. Japan's Tokyo Movie Shinsha (*Case Closed*) was in charge of the animation. The studio, well known in Japan for its work on many high-profile anime series, also worked on multiple notable Western cartoons like *Rainbow Brite* and *Futurama*.

This sci-fi series with a Western flair takes place after a pair of aliens approach Earth for help against the invading Crown Empire, exposing humans to interstellar travel. Years later, the Bureau for Extra-Terrestrial Affairs is founded to defend space colonists and keep law and order. Remastered and packed with bonus features, this set is an adventurous buy for the nostalgic. It even includes the episodes in proper chronological order—something the original broadcast never accomplished. ■ Danica Davidson



GALAXY RANGERS

LIPSERVICE

Lisa Ortiz, voice of Lina Inverse in 'Slayers'



If you mess with her, she'll Dragon Slave your village until it's a hole in the ground—at least, Lina Inverse of *Slayers* will. We're not sure about Lisa Ortiz, the voice actress behind her, but when we chatted with her at the New York Anime Festival, we decided to be careful all the same.

How do you think anime and its fans have changed?

It's changed a lot. The fans have changed. Back in the '90s, people were very much against dubs. It's also involved with a lot of major companies controlling what's being distributed and licensed. There's a lot more of it in the mainstream.



LALA RU

What about the way dubs are produced?

When I first started, it was a little more relaxed. I got to see the Japanese version and work with it before I went in. You can still do that, but in a lot of times, you go in and the director tells you what's going on.

How do you keep the voices straight when you're doing several at once in one series, like you did in *Irresponsible Captain Tylor*? You have to have a sense of who the character is, and when you get that down, it's fine. On *Winx Club*, I play four characters, and I actually fought myself in one scene. For me, the voice goes along with the expressions you wear.

Do you prefer heroes or villains?

I loved playing Shiori [in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*]. Everyone wants to be the hero, but there's something about the other side. She was complicated, and she had a little more depth.

And she turned into a car in the movie.

Exactly. Who doesn't love that?

Any non-villain roles you liked?

Lala Ru from *Now and Then, Here and There* is a favorite, which is odd because she doesn't say a lot, and I liked Tsubasa in *His and Her Circumstances*.

Is Lina still your favorite, though?

Definitely. My favorite thing about her is her sense of humor. And she's got a sarcastic quality, which I relate to a lot. She's a heroine, but she's also very self-motivated, and she's very much in charge of everything.

What's your favorite snack at 2 in the morning?

I feel like I should say Pocky. No, I'm kidding. But it's really tortillas and cheese. ■ AH



LINA INVERSE

dvdreleases MAY

BALDR FORCE OVA

When a group of hackers attempts to make its way into a UN anti-cyber terrorism organization called FLAK, their leader is killed and young Toru is arrested. Hoping to avoid prison and find his friend's murderer, he joins FLAK to stop Fei Dao from attacking the web. (FUNimation, \$29.98)

BEAST KING GOLION VOL. 1

The original Japanese series that became *Voltron*, uncut and restored. The AI mecha Golion is cursed for his brutality and becomes five different robots, which become mankind's best chance at defeating a hostile race of aliens. (Media Blasters, \$34.99)

BLACK BLOOD BROTHERS VOL. 3

In the shadow of danger, Mimiko and Kelly search for the Silver Blade. When she's attacked, help comes from an unlikely source. Jiro defends the Special Zone and learns the truth behind the Eleventh Yard. (FUNimation, \$29.99)

BLEACH VOL. 10

Chad squares off against the leader of 8th Company, Shunsui Kyoraku, as Ichigo gathers the courage to fight Kenpachi. After being wounded by the bloodthirsty captain, he's pulled into his inner world and faces a whole new kind of struggle against himself. (VIZ Media, \$24.98)



LUCKY STAR

DEVIL MAY CRY VOL. 2

The devil hunter Dante is hired to break a man out of a demonic prison and keep a possessed rock star away from treasure seekers. All in a day's work. (ADV Films, \$29.98)

DRAGON BALL Z: DEAD ZONE/ WORLD'S STRONGEST

This disc contains the first and second

Dragon Ball Z movies. Goku must rescue his son from an old rival who uses the dragon balls to become immortal and ward off an evil doctor from using his body as a vessel for his brain. (FUNimation, \$29.98; Blu Ray, \$34.98)

HARUKA: BEYOND THE STREAM OF TIME VOL. 2

Fraught with feelings for the Demon Clan leader, Akane performs her first duty as priestess. A new Guardian warrior is revealed as tensions between the members rise. (Bandai Visual USA, \$29.98)

HELL GIRL VOL. 6

Hajime tries to intervene to save the Hell Girl's next target, but can't identify who'd want to send a kindly nurse to Hell. Ai begins to regain memories of a childhood friend and the reason why she became a messenger of vengeance. (FUNimation, \$29.98)

HONEY AND CLOVER

In this live-action movie based on the manga, it's love at first sight for Takemoto, a college art student unsure about his future, when he meets a girl named Hagumi. Too bad his friend Morita also has eyes for the shy painter. (VIZ Media, \$24.98)

KIRAMEKI PROJECT COLLECTION

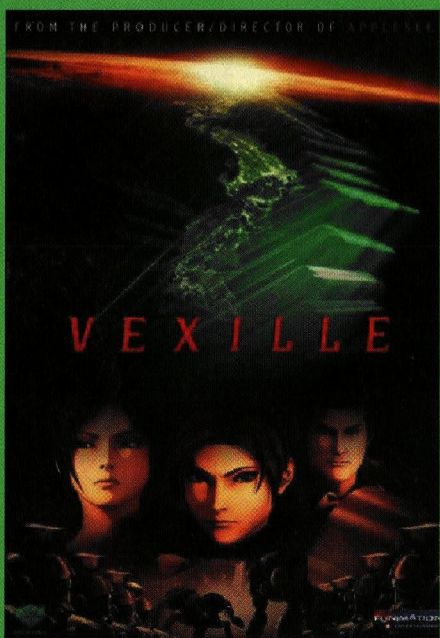
A kingdom ruled by three cute princesses is threatened after a giant robot controlled by the ugly Old Guys makes quick work of its neighboring countries. Hope lies with the princess Kana and her android friend. (Media Blasters, \$19.99)

MUSTSEE

Vexille

On an alternative Earth, Japan has become entirely isolated. Having developed life-extending biotechnology, the country earned the suspicion of the United Nations. Under surveillance, Japan decided to retreat from the world stage instead of giving in to the UN's threats to end their research. Ten years have passed without communication with the island nation. An American military unit called SWORD is sent to infiltrate their shores to investigate Daiwa Heavy Industries' use of robot technology in 72 hours.

Directed and written by Fumihiko Sori, the film follows Vexille, a female SWORD member who gets separated from her team and discovers a very different Tokyo. Nursed back to health by a rebel named Maria, she learns about a plan to strike the industrial giant. The soundtrack to the fully-CGI film combines the talents of well-known electronica artists Paul Oakenfold, The Prodigy, Basement Jaxx and more, with the movie's theme performed by J-pop artist mink. Look for it this month from FUNimation for \$29.98. ■ Meghan Grant

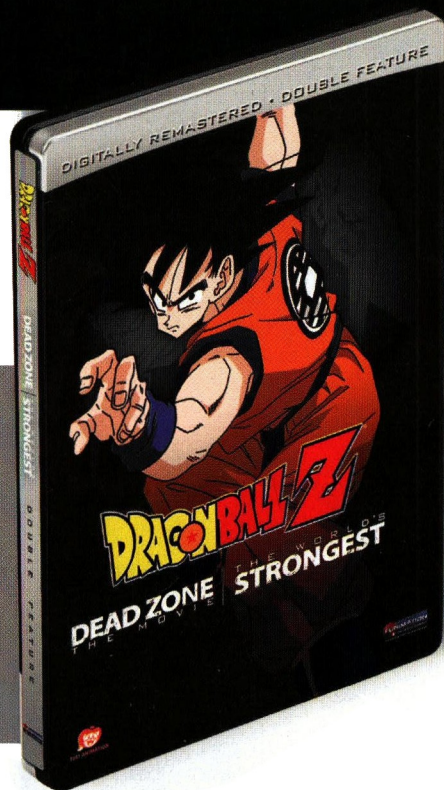


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DISC DRIVE

Japan's DVD awesomeness



Garden of Sinners: Fukan Fukei LE

Based on a light novel series by Type-Moon, *Garden of Sinners: Fukan Fukei* follows a girl who can destroy objects by striking their "death points."

If this sounds a little like *Lunar Legend Tsukihime*, that's because the two titles are loosely related. Why would several young girls commit suicide in the same way? The Limited Edition contains a CD, a booklet and a pinup.



Kyo Kara Maoh! Second Season Box Set

Fans of this incredibly silly fantasy-comedy may want to consider importing this collection, since the U.S. release is currently in legal limbo. This box set contains the second season as well as a bonus CD.



Summer Days with Coo Collector's Box

This award-winning movie is the tale of a boy who takes a kappa creature home as a pet, much to his family's surprise! *Coo* has two different special edition releases: one with a disc of bonus features, a booklet and a box, and the other with a stuffed kappa. ■ Chad

FREESWAG

Lucky Star vol. 1 Special Edition

Lucky Star has always been linked to *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* due to their



shared otaku themes, and this association only grows stronger as Bandai and Kadokawa are giving *Lucky Star* an extravagant DVD release equal to *Haruhi's*. The first volume will come with two CDs, a t-shirt, a screen wipe and a collector's box.

■ CC

LUCKY STAR VOL. 1

Konata is smart and athletic, but doesn't have good grades and isn't interested in sports. The reason? She's a huge otaku! Follow along as her and her friends indulge in their favorite hobby. (Bandai Entertainment, \$29.90; SE, \$64.98)

MIRAGE OF BLAZE—WORLD OF DVD COLLECTION

Takaya goes from high school student to exorcist when his abilities are awakened by a fellow possessor to battle the Feudal Underworld. Unable to remember his past life, Takaya aims to protect his friend Yuzuru as a war of clans begins. Complete series. (Media Blasters, \$34.99)

NARUTO VOL. 23 & 24

Jiraiya and Naruto locate Tsunade, along with the evil Orochimaru. Hoping to bring her to their side, Naruto bets that he'll master the powerful Rasengan jutsu in only one week. A battle breaks out between the Sannin, Leaf Village's top ninja. (VIZ Media, \$19.98 each)

ONE PIECE SEASON ONE PART ONE

Luffy wants to become the King of the Pirates more than anything. He and his ragtag crew set sail for the dangerous Grand Line to claim the legendary treasure One Piece. The adventures of the rubber man and his crew are uncut for the first time. (FUNimation, \$49.98)

SHATTERED ANGELS VOL. 1

Kuu's dreams of meeting her prince come true when the handsome Kyoshiro saves her from battling mechanical monsters that nearly crush her. Both students attend Academia, a thriving city school built after a huge disaster ten years ago. (ADV Films, \$29.98)

SHIN CHAN SEASON ONE PART ONE

You've seen him on Adult Swim; now check him out on DVD! Shin chan is a crude and troublesome kid who loves his cartoon hero Action Bastard and driving the adults in his life crazy. (FUNimation, \$39.99)

SHUFFLE! VOL. 3

The girls hit the beach for a day of fun, but find themselves

in deep trouble when Rin and Sia become stranded. Their close encounter stirs rumors of a wedding, stirring up a storm of emotions from the other ladies.

(FUNimation, \$29.99)

STRAWBERRY PANIC! VOL. 2

Amane considers running for Etoile, but Kaname and Momomi have different ideas of their own. Nagisa and Tamao look into one of the seven mysteries of the Strawberry Dorms. (Media Blasters, \$22.99)

TRUE TEARS VOL. 1

After losing her father, Hiromi moves in with Shinichiro's family. He believes she's crying inside, despite her happy facade, but can't muster the nerve to talk to her.

(Bandai Visual USA, \$29.99)

TWEENY WITCHES VOL. 2

In their quest to capture all the freed familiars, Arusu, Sheila and Eva travel to the Wizard Kingdom, revealing a much different place than Witch Realm, as well as a traitor from home. As a mysterious plague hits

the Witches, the Warlocks plan an invasion. (Media Blasters, \$24.99)

THE WALLFLOWER VOL. 3

Kyohei goes to extreme lengths to help Sunako study and dresses up as a nerd! The boys have new makeovers on their hands; they've got to make Ranmaru unlikeable to save him from marriage and turn Sunako back to herself.

(ADV Films, \$29.98)

WELCOME TO THE NHK VOL. 4

The island meeting with an Internet group is hardly paradise—it's a suicide pact! Jogasaki invites the gang's family to a hot springs trip for intervention, but Tatsuhiro picks up another addiction: a fantasy MMORPG.

(ADV Films, \$29.98)

XXXHOLIC VOL. 2

Watanuki encounters more strange clients, including a woman addicted to computers and a spirit who wants to save a friend. Even a trip to an oden shop proves spooky!

(FUNimation, \$29.99) **BT**



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television

リモコンはどこなんだ!?

IN LIVING COLOR

More manga series are transforming into live-action shows instead of anime

Sometimes, it's easy to forget that there's more to Japanese TV than anime, bizarre game shows and Power Rangers-esque tokusatsu series. Despite getting less attention from overseas audiences, live-action J-drama shows fulfill a need for some home-grown melodrama, and like anime, they have no problem mining manga titles for series to adapt. Shōjo favorite *Boys Over Flowers* has seen two live-action series in the past decade and, recently, the live-action version of



MUSIC TO YOUR EARS The combination of unlikely romance, weird teenagers and classical stylings of Japan and the rest of the music world made *Nodame Cantabile* a hit in manga, anime and live-action.

Honey and Clover was a staple of the winter 2008 television season. Even anime has been known to get in on the act when the live-action version of *Hell Girl* aired simultaneously with the second season of the anime.

The most recent manga hit to get the TV drama treatment is the upcoming adaptation of Yuu Watase's comedy/romance manga, *Absolute Boyfriend*. The series, about a girl who orders a love robot that she can't afford, has been due for an adaptation for some time. What makes it extra special, though, is that it's one of the growing number of manga series to get live-action adaptations before they're ever animated.

One such series in recent memory is the 2003 adaptation of Yayoi Ogawa's *Kimi wa Pet*, released by TOKYOPOP as *Tramps Like Us*. An emotionally distant career woman and the homeless man she adopts as a pet lent an amusing yet touching look at the cost of being a driven woman in Japan's male-dominated business world. In 2006 *Nodame Cantabile*, an odd-couple romance between two classical musicians, proved to be so popular that an anime adaptation followed it less than a year later.

Live-action dramas offer several new challenges compared to anime adaptations. Due to the difficulty of translating illustrated

effects to real life and the use of real human actors, they tend to go in creatively different directions than the source material while retaining the original's spirit. They also take relatively little time to write and shoot, which helps the shows be produced on the cheap. As such, J-dramas are an excellent way to expose a property to an older demographic. Unfortunately, they also tend to be short. *Absolute Boyfriend* ran for 19 volumes, which is a lot of story to fit into a single TV run—but if it does well, an anime version might not be far behind, and that's enough for everyone to enjoy. ■ Megan Rebuck

FUTUREVISION

Three new shows for Japanese TV

MICHIKO TO HATCHIN

Early details of studio manglobe's (*Ergo Proxy*, *Samurai Champloo*) next project have surfaced. In what appears to be a girl-oriented buddy series, bombshell prison breaker Michiko teams up with runaway Hatchin as they hit the road. Former storyboarder Sayo Yamamoto (*Death Note*) takes the helm in her directorial debut.

YASAI NO YOUSEI—N.Y. SALAD

This impossibly cute vegetarian series began a second season this past March, to the cheers of fans who just can't get enough of the inner lives of fruits and vegetables. Based on Yoshitaka Amano's (*Vampire Hunter D*) art and animated with both CGI and traditional animation, *N.Y. Salad* runs only five minutes long each episode.

A STITCH IN TIME

Details are still sparse, but Disney is teaming up with studio Madhouse on a number of titles for Japanese TV, including a series roughly based on the movie *Lilo and Stitch*. The new series will star a young girl named Hanako on an unnamed island instead of Hawaii.

■ Angela Hanson





MAGNIFICENT SEVEN Cell phones and robots are key to solving crimes in *Phone Detectives*.

ON THE MOVE

Production I.G and Takashi Miike team up on 'Mobile Phone Detectives 7'

There's a first time for everything. Production I.G, the studio behind top anime such as *Le Chevalier D'Eon* and *Ghost in the Shell*, has produced its first live-action drama, *Keitai Sosakan 7* (which means "Mobile Phone Detectives 7"), which started airing on April 2. The studio provided visual effects and animation sequences for the 51-episode show, which is being overseen by Takashi Miike (*Ichi the Killer*).

Mobile Phone Detectives 7 follows the cyber-crime-solving adventures of high school student Keita Tsunashima, a recent addition to the team of secret agents known as Under-Anchor. His partner is an artificially intelligent cell named Phone Braver 7, who can transform from a normal phone into a tiny humanoid robot. Conveniently enough, viewers can get their own working, transforming versions of the cellular detective from Japanese mobile phone provider Softbank, complete with arms, legs and simulated A.I. program.

Anime fans will recognize a number of the big-name episode directors on board, including Kazuya Konaka (*Astro Boy*), Shusuke Kaneko (live-action *Death Note* movies) and Mamoru Oshii (*Ghost in the Shell*). ■ *Meghan Grant*

HERE THERE BE DRAGONS

Lina Inverse and companions to return in new 'Slayers Revolution' series

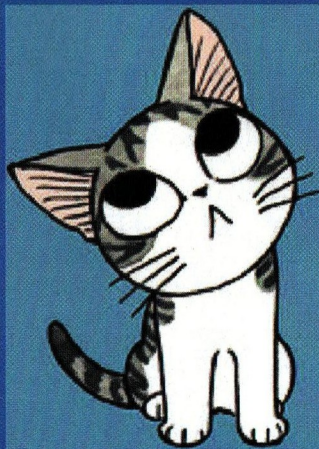
A classic anime franchise once thought to be finished is about to come back to life. A new *Slayers* television series, titled *Slayers Revolution*, has been announced by J.C. Staff, the studio that produced the first three *Slayers* series: *Slayers*, *Slayers Next* and *Slayers Try*. Original director Takashi Watanabe is also back on board for the latest installment of the series. It'll be based on the original fantasy novels by Hajime Kanzaka, although the new project will be an anime-exclusive story. Little information about the project has been released; the fate of series lead Lina Inverse is still up in the air.

The original *Slayers* series followed Lina, a young, feisty and sometimes irritating sorceress, and her partner Gourry, a valiant but thickheaded knight, as they experienced adventures and dangers in a fantasy setting populated by Dungeons and Dragons-esque characters. Its zany humor and numerous parodies of fantasy conventions, as well as its popular sequels, made it a long-running hit. ■ *Carolyn Fowlkes*



TUNE INTO TOKYO

The latest anime debuts on Japanese TV



CHI'S SWEET HOME

Animal lovers, take note: *Chi's Sweet Home* is exactly what you're looking for if you want a cute slice-of-life show about a grey-and-white kitten and her family as she grows up. When Yohei Yamada finds a lost little cat, he seems destined for heartbreak, since his family's apartment complex prohibits pets. But once Chi captures their hearts, she becomes a beloved family secret. These 5-minute shorts feature Chi's adventures with her family, along with dogs, cats and other animals.

MOEGAKU*5

Don't be confused by the fact that there are real people running around. *Moegaku*5* is a mixture of anime and live-action footage. Tsukushima Moe gets magical powers in a very un-mysterious way: a stranger shows up and declares that from now on, Moe will be a magical girl. But instead of fighting to save the world from monsters, a big part of her job is helping the audience learn languages like English and Korean. This education game-based show is mainly for kids, but anyone who wants to learn through the power of cute should try it.



PORFY NO NAGAI TABI

This isn't the first time an anime series has been based on a French novel. Think *The Little Prince*, *Gankutsuou* and *Shojo Cosette* (last year's cartoony *Les Misérables*). Based on *Les Orphelins de Simitra* by Paul-Jacques Bonzon, *Porfy* is about two Greek orphans, Porphyas and Mina, who lose their parents in a catastrophic earthquake and then travel all around Europe together rather than stay in an assigned foster home. Nippon Animation already has a flair for turning Western books such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Anne of Green Gables* into anime, making *Porfy* right up its alley.

■ *Danica Davidson and AH*



CONNECT 4-KOMA

Four-panel manga series make a bid for popularity in the States

Many American manga fans are familiar with Osamu Tezuka, the legendary creator of *Phoenix* and *Astro Boy* who pioneered the complex narratives and cinematic layouts that have become touchstones of the medium. Yet far fewer know the name of Machiko Hasegawa, who began publishing manga in 1946, like Tezuka, and is famous in Japan for *Sazae-san*, a 4-koma (4-panel) manga that's been in serialization for 25 years.

Perhaps that's because 4-koma manga itself isn't well known in North America. In manga terms, 4-koma ("yon-koma" in Japanese) is a comic strip format consisting of four cells, most commonly stacked vertically and read top to bottom or, more rarely, arranged in a 2x2 grid format and numbered according to the order they are to be read.

When looking at the format, 4-koma comics appear very similar to traditional American newspaper comic strips. However, even though it's most often used for humble comedic purposes, the format is believed to have been inspired by the classic four-part narrative sequence *kishotenketsu* (beginning, development, twist, ending) that originated in China.

In Japan, 4-koma can be found everywhere, from



YOU'RE SO LUCKY The market for 4-koma manga may be limited now, but more titles like *Lucky Star* (above) might change that.

cookbooks to newspapers. There are even manga magazines that publish 4-koma exclusively.

Many manga-ka like using 4-koma as bonus material for the collected volumes of their serialized material, cracking self-deprecating jokes or parodying their work. Eiji Otsuka has published an entire 4-koma parody series of his noir thriller *MPD-Psycho* called, appropriately, *MPD-Psychoco*. They are also widely used by amateur artists in fanzines.

Standalone 4-koma titles often form an ongoing narrative over multiple strips revolving around a recurring cast of characters. These translate especially well into anime, and *Sazae-san*, Kiyohiko Azuma's *Azumanga Daioh*, Kagami

Yoshimizu's *Lucky Star* and Hisaichi Ichi's *My Neighbors the Yamadas*, to name just a few, have all been animated.

Fortunately for fans on this side of the Pacific, 4-koma series are slowly but surely attracting the attention of licensors. ADV re-released all four volumes of the endearing *Azumanga Daioh* in one doorstopper of an omnibus last year. Meanwhile, newcomer Yen Press has picked up two 4-koma titles: *Shoulder-a-Coffin Kuro* by Satoko Kiyuzuki and *Sunshine Sketch* by Ume Aoki. Both feature cute girls, one exploring the world with a coffin on her back and a bat by her side, the other encountering plenty of adventure at a boarding house.

Shoulder-a-Coffin Kuro's first volume is available this month, and *Sunshine Sketch* hits shelves in June. ■ Casey Brienza



AZUMANGA DAIOH'S YOMI

ON THE STRIP

Three influential 4-koma

PALEPOLI

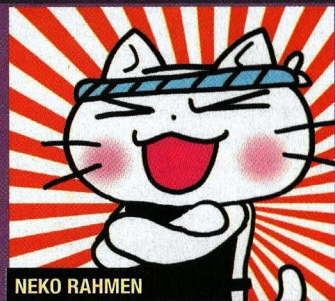
This eccentric single-volume work by the avant-garde Usamaru Furuya deploys the 4-koma format to make biting jokes about art and artifice. There is no overarching plot: Furuya prefers revisiting a small set of themes and scenarios. Excerpts of *Palepoli* are available in English in VIZ Media's *Secret Comics Japan* anthology.

NEKO RAHMEN

Kenji Sonishi's manga started off as a humble strip in *Monthly Comic Blade*. It chronicled the demanding job of a talking cat who runs a ramen stall. The comic was a surprising success, inspiring a series of three-minute online animated shorts available in both Japan and the U.S., courtesy of Vuze, Inc.

AZUMANGA DAIOH

Among the most beloved of Kiyohiko Azuma's slice-of-life tales, this four-volume comedy series explores the lives of six high school girls and their quirky homeroom teacher, for the duration of their years in high school. *Azumanga Daioh* is available in English in its entirety from ADV Manga. ■ CB



NEKO RAHMEN

DOLL PARTS

'Rozen Maiden' finale clouded by controversy

A bit of explanation is in order for the eighth and final volume of Peach-Pit's *Rozen Maiden*, due this month from TOKYOPOP. Faithful readers of the popular series, which follows dueling dolls and the hapless shut-in Jun, may be surprised by the volume's low page count and abrupt ending. Even more intriguing than the manga's last plot twist is the controversy that has been swirling around it.

In the first half of 2007, *Rozen Maiden* stopped appearing in the Japanese magazine *Comic BIRZ* without explanation, and when it did return, it was only to wrap up as quickly as possible. For a manga so popular it was a favorite of former Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Aso, it was an ignoble conclusion.

Rumors ran rampant about a possible conflict between the artists and the editorial department. Some speculated that publisher Gentosha Comics was putting pressure on the two-woman team of Peach-Pit to make the manga more closely resemble its popular animated adaptation. Upon resuming the series, Peach-Pit issued a vague apology, commenting that they hadn't lost interest in making the series.

Still, Peach-Pit has contributed a *Rozen Maiden* one-shot to *Young Jump* magazine. Perhaps *Rozen Maiden* will rise again. ■ CB



ROZEN MAIDEN'S SHINKU

HIGH SEAS HAVOC

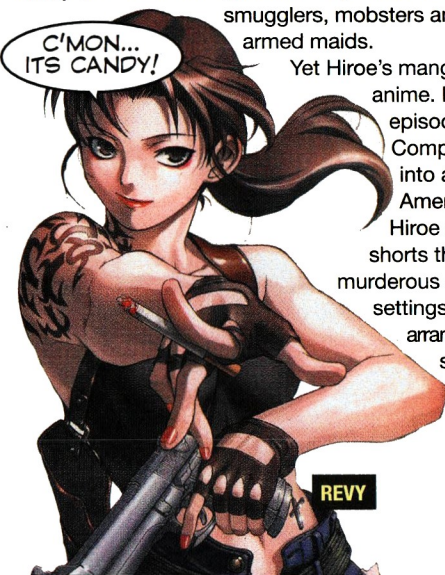
'Black Lagoon' manga makes its way to the U.S.

At this time last year, the *Black Lagoon* manga was a curious no-show in North America. While Madhouse's anime adaptation had a strong 2007 U.S. debut with its tales of bullet-fueled piracy in the South China Sea, Rei Hiroe's original manga sat in Japan. Now, while *Black Lagoon*'s future on DVD is up in the air, VIZ Media will release the manga in the U.S.

Anime director Sunao Katabuchi stuck close to Hiroe's original, so fans will recognize the general story of Rokuro "Rock" Okajima, a salaryman hurled by corporate conspiracy into the world of high-seas mercenaries. He's the newest member of Lagoon Company, which also includes the steadfast Vietnam vet Dutch, the reclusive hacker Benny and the volatile gun-nut Revy. That's to say nothing of the smugglers, mobsters and psychotic, heavily armed maids.

Yet Hiroe's manga goes beyond the anime. It continues the episodic story of the Lagoon Company, thrusting them into a new battle with South American crime syndicates. Hiroe also includes bonus shorts that put *Black Lagoon*'s murderous cast in high-school settings and other bizarre arrangements. Get the full story when the first volume ships on August 12.

■ Todd Ciolek



REVVY

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE

VOICES OF A DISTANT STAR

When Mikako is drafted to wage war in the outer reaches of space, she and her would-be boyfriend Noboru, who's left behind on Earth, communicate via text messages. This poignant anime by Makoto Shinkai has been adapted into an equally poignant manga by Mizu Sahara, which departs from its inspiration in some significant ways. ■ CB

MANGA

ANIME

THE CAREER

Mikako knew she had been drafted for a very long time and did not tell Noboru. Once on the Lysithea, she is befriended by Captain Miwa and fellow pilot Hisa.

The specific circumstances surrounding Mikako's recruitment to the UN Space Army and her subsequent training in space are left vague. Her crewmates are not developed as characters.

THE OTHER WOMAN

Life goes on for Noboru after Mikako leaves. He's befriended by Wakana, a female classmate and a member of the archery club, and the two date for a time.

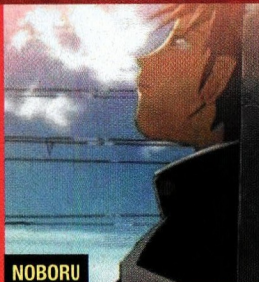


WAKANA

After Mikako leaves, Noboru appears to spend most of his time checking his cell for messages. He is shown only briefly in the company of a girl, who is never identified.

THE STYLE

Sahara's artwork is airy and graceful and focuses on the human subjects of the story. Scenery remains for the most part wispy and indistinct.



NOBORU

The world of Shinkai's animation is rich and detailed, pools of liquid light making ordinary earthly scenes look magical. By comparison, Noboru and Mikako look somewhat sketchy.

THE REUNION

Mikako survives the battle on Agharta and discovers that her beloved Noboru, who decided to transfer to a technical school and major in aeronautics, will be on the rescue team coming to save her.

A vision of herself promises Mikako that she and Noboru will be someday reunited, but her story in the anime ends ambiguously after a climatic battle on Agharta leaves her drifting in space.

THE END

The manga is complete in one volume. Sahara has maintained a working relationship with Shinkai and has also adapted his *The Place Promised in Our Early Days* for serialization in *Afternoon*.

The anime is an entirely self-contained 30-minute OVA. Animator Makoto Shinkai has since gone on to produce *The Place Promised in Our Early Days* and *5 Centimeters Per Second*.



MIKAKO

mangareleases MAY

BERSERK VOL. 23

Guts is finally reunited with his beloved Casca. It's anything but a honeymoon, however, and their journey to Puck's homeland is fraught with plenty of peril. Kentaro Miura (Dark Horse, \$13.95)

B.O.D.Y. VOL. 1

Ryoko has weird taste in men, and her latest crush is Ryunosuke, a brooding, handsome type who works for a host club. Now...how to make him hers? Ao Mimori (VIZ Media, \$8.99)

CY-BELIEVERS VOL. 2

Rui is busy devoting herself to the new club, and her fiancé Natori is busy getting in the way. Still, perhaps he's not as bad as she thought. Shioiko Mizuki (Go! Comi, \$10.99)

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND VOL. 1

Sick of living in the shadows, Mina Tepes pays down Japan's debt and gains authority to build a "special district" for vampires off the nation's coast. Nozomu Tamaki (Seven Seas, \$9.99)

DR. SLUMP VOL. 15

The Norimaki household gears up to welcome its newest member. But Turbo isn't an ordinary baby, and Senbei soon learns that being a parent is anything but easy! Akira Toriyama (VIZ Media, \$7.99)

EDEN VOL. 10

Years have passed, and the Closure Virus has mutated again. Now it can infect inorganic matter as well, starting new battles

among the forces vying for control of an already chaotic planet. Hiroki Endo (Dark Horse, \$12.95)

ENCHANTER VOL. 8

What is Fulcanelli's relationship with Yuka? And will Haruhiko give up and turn his body over to Fulcanelli's soul? The trio's breathtaking adventures continue. Izumi Kawachi (DMP, \$12.95)

GIN TAMA VOL. 6

Hot nurses, the queen of the cockroaches, a sinister cult and a zombie...bear? The fun never stops for ex-samurai and jack-of-all-trades Sakada "Gin" Gintoki. Hideaki Sorachi (VIZ Media, \$7.99)

HARIDAMA: MAGIC GRAM SCHOOL

Kokuyo and Harika need swords to cast spells, making them "inferior" to other wizards who do not. At least they have each other for support! From the creator of *Venus Versus Virus*. Atsushi Suzumi (Del Rey, \$10.95)

KAMISAMA KAZOKU VOL. 1

Life's tough when you're the son of a god—parents can make things too easy! What will happen when Samtaro tells his to back off? Yoshikazu Kuwashima and Tapari (Go! Comi, \$10.99)



KANNAZUKI NO MIKO VOL. 1

Himeko and Chikane are two ordinary girls who discover, on their sixteenth birthday, that they are actually goddesses of the sun and the moon destined to save the world from annihilation. Kaishaku (TOKYOPOP, \$10.99)

KING OF THORN VOL. 4

A secret video explains the truth behind the virus to the survivors. Marco, who may know more than he'll admit, has been chosen to infiltrate Level 4. Yuji Iwahara (TOKYOPOP, \$9.99)

KINGDOM HEARTS II VOL. 2

Roxas strives to uncover his connection to Sora, his dream self, while Namine must evade DiZ's plans to "dispose" of her. Whose side is Axel on, anyway? Shiro Amano (TOKYOPOP, \$9.99)

METRO SURVIVE VOL. 2

The discovery of another band of survivors in the upper basement offers a glimpse of hope, but food is running short, and a coup just makes things worse. Yuki Fujisawa (DrMaster, \$9.95)

NARUTO VOL. 29

When the two ninja come together in the face of a common enemy, mysteries regarding Gaara and the shape of Naruto's future might finally be revealed. Masashi Kishimoto (VIZ Media, \$7.95)

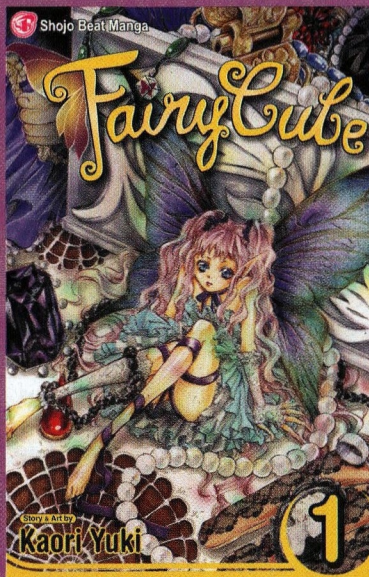
MUSTREAD

Fairy Cube

Do you believe in fairies? Ian Hasumi certainly does. For as long as he can remember, his father has told him that his mother looked just like a fairy, and given Ian's ability to see mysterious beings, he's inclined to believe it. Even worse, the malicious Tokage, a magical boy with green hair and red eyes, has taken over Ian's body! Now it's up to Ian to unravel the truth behind the sinister Fairy Murders—and take back his life from Tokage.

Fairy Cube is VIZ Media's latest offering from famed shojo manga-ka Kaori Yuki, creator of the epic *Angel Sanctuary* and *God Child* (also available from VIZ). Like her earlier work, this richly detailed three-volume series is steeped in Western mythological and gothic tradition. It also boasts a liberal dose of aesthetic violence and a decided penchant for the perverse, though the plot of *Fairy Cube* does not, happily, resemble *Angel Sanctuary*'s disturbingly close relationship between siblings.

The first volume retails for \$8.99 and lands on store shelves May 6. ■ CB



NEGIMA! VOL. 18

Negi has confronted Chao, the master magician bent on world domination, and emerged victorious. What new adventures await the diminutive English teacher and his precious students? Ken Akamatsu (Del Rey, \$10.95)

NUI VOL. 1

Kaya's vast collection of adorable stuffed animals comes to life through the power of her love—and they turn into people! Unfortunately, not all of them love her like she loves them... Natsumi Mukai (Broccoli, \$9.99)

ONIMUSHA: TWILIGHT OF DESIRE VOL. 1

Samanosuke goes head to head with Toyotami Hideyoshi's nephew, and the story behind Hideyoshi's Genma power is revealed. Inspired by the Capcom videogames. Kairi Shimotsuki (Udon Entertainment, \$12.95)

PUMPKIN SCISSORS VOL. 3

Three years after a cease-fire between the Empire and the Republic of Frost, all is still not well. Starvation, disease and crime run rampant. Can Pumpkin Scissors stave off total chaos? Ryotaro Iwanaga (Del Rey, \$10.95)

THE RECORD OF A FALLEN VAMPIRE VOL. 1

Every 50 years, The Black Swan possesses the body of a human girl, giving her the power to destroy the Vampire King and Queen. Are Akabara's days numbered? From the writer of *Spiral*. Kyo Shirodaira and Yuri Kimura (VIZ Media, \$9.99)

ROZEN MAIDEN VOL. 8

The battle has entered a new stage, and the dolls learn more about their youngest sister. As Kirakisho ensnares more and more dolls, Jun is forced to make a harsh choice. Concluding volume. Peach-Pit (TokyoPop, \$5.99)

SAND CHRONICLES VOL. 2

Ann is adjusting to life in the country at last. She even has a boyfriend! But now the father she hardly knows wants her to move back to Tokyo with him. Hinako Ashihara (VIZ Media, \$8.99)

SGT. FROG VOL. 15

In preparation for the coming invasion, Sgt. Keroro attempts to remodel the Hinata home. Unfortunately, Aki is less than thrilled with the prospect of an Extreme Home Makeover. Mine Yoshizaki (TokyoPop, \$9.99)



SHOULDER-A-COFFIN KURO VOL. 1

Coffin on her back and little bat friend Zen by her side, the charming tomboy Kuro explores the world in pursuit of a witch and encounters all sorts of adventures along the way. Satoko Kiyuzuki (Yen Press, \$10.99)

SWAN VOL. 13

Masumi and her partner Leonhardt arrive at the prestigious New York City Ballet. But Masumi is struggling with modern dance, and her choreographer isn't impressed. Kyoko Ariyoshi (CMX, \$9.99)

TOTO! VOL. 1

Kakashi, a small-town boy who yearns to see the world, catches a ride on a magical zep-pelin—which just happens to be loaded up with a gang of ruthless criminals and their booty! Yuko Osada (Del Rey, \$10.95)

TWO FLOWERS FOR THE DRAGON VOL. 1

Shakuya has two fiancés. Fortunately, the tattoos on her hands will ultimately reveal which man she truly loves best. From the creator of *The Recipe for Gertrude*. Nari Kusakawa (CMX, \$9.99)

ULTIMATE VENUS VOL. 1

Yuzu discovers after her mother's death that she is heir to a wealthy estate, which may well be more trouble than it's worth! From the creator of *Tenshi Ja Nai!!*. Takako Shigematsu (Go! Comi, \$10.99)

WALKIN BUTTERFLY VOL. 3

The "old bat" is in the hospital, and Michiko has missed the audition for Mihara's upcoming fashion show. Her dream of becoming a runway model feels further away than ever. Chihiro Tamaki (Aurora, \$10.95)

YOU'RE SO COOL VOL. 1

Seung-Ha is the prince of the school, and to Nan-Wo he's just a distant star. But she's soon in for a rude awakening—who knew the dreamboat was such a jerk? Young-Hee Lee (Yen Press, \$10.99)

READ ON ARRIVAL

Manga to learn Japanese for



Giant Robo

Not to be confused with the concurrent *GR: Giant Robo* manga, this series is subtitled *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*. Enlisting *s-CRY-ed* artist Yasunari Toda, Yasuhiro Imagawa re-imagines Giant Robo, its young master Daisaku and the anime's vast array of wonderfully ridiculous villains.

Mirai Nikki

Death Note meets *When They Cry* in Sakae Esuno's new horror series.

Yukiteru fills his lonely high-school life by keeping a pointless diary and imagining bizarre friends. He's caught up in a twisted game when his diary starts showing his future and his imaginary friends become real. His classmate Yuno, whose crush on him nears psychosis, is only the first of the other diary-keepers he meets.



KeroKero Ace

KeroKero Ace ("kerokero" being Japanese for "ribbit") is a spin-off of *Gundam Ace*. Aimed at the younger shonen crowd, the anthology shills countless incarnations of *Sgt. Frog* and *Gundam* alongside other kid-oriented series like *.hack//link* and the unnaturally cute *Petite Eva*. Also prominent are manga based on games, including *Soul Calibur Legends* and *Zack & Wiki*. ■ TC



theatrical

イカ味ポップコーンをつくごさい

FRIGHT FEST

Japan's intelligent horror movies provoke imitation in the U.S.

Why isn't there more horror in the anime world? It's a common question among anime fans both young and old. Plenty of anime use select elements of horror, and vampires appear in genres from shojo to action, but pickings are slim when it comes to pure, undiluted horror-themed titles. But where anime is lagging behind, the Japanese live-action film industry is going strong, with a record so compelling that the whole world is taking notice.

In recent years, Japanese horror has received attention for its trademark style, which is quite different from modern Western horror. Most American films are straightforward, building suspense with traditional storytelling patterns, and their most engaging sequences come from sudden shocks and scenes of pain, torture and gore. But while Japanese horror has its own set of schlock-fests, as a whole, it takes a different approach, building more deep-seated terror through extended suspense, creatively bizarre yet emotional storylines, creepy rather than gross visuals and the occasional outbreak of extreme violence that stands out by being the exception and not the rule. Instead of relying on revulsion, J-horror films deal in murderous tension and dread. It's a unique approach to horror, but a good result makes us think as well as shiver in our shoes.

The intelligent style of Japanese horror is so distinctive that even Hollywood has taken notice, giving life to the trend of producing American remakes of Japanese hits, sometimes even enlisting the services of the original directors. The most famous of these is *The*



JEEPERS CREEPERS *The Grudge* was one of several flicks that scared the pants off both Japanese and American audiences.

Ring, an Americanized version of *Ringu* and its endless cycle of death. Other remakes soon followed, including *Dark Water*, *The Grudge* (a.k.a. *Ju-On*), *Pulse* (*Kairo*) and, most recently, *One Missed Call* (*Chakushin Ari*).

These Hollywood imports have had mixed success in the box office; while *The Ring* and *The Grudge* were both notable hits that earned sequels, the others haven't met with the same level of success, due to changes from the originals or divergent audience tastes. But regardless of gross profits,

they've provided widespread exposure for the Japanese originals and drummed up demand for their DVD releases.

Japan's isn't the only horror that Hollywood is trying on; the most recent re-do of Asian horror is *The Eye*, based on Hong Kong's Pang Brothers' *Jian Gui*. With so many people hungry for the creeping chill of horror yet looking for something other than rehashed gore-fests, it seems that the fan following for Japanese horror will only continue to grow.

■ Chad Clayton

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Three popcorn-sized movie updates for otaku

TAKING AIM

The *Trigun* movie, subject of rumors since studio Madhouse co-founder Masao Maruyama let its existence slip at a 2005 Otakon panel, finally has a projected premiere date in 2009. An advertisement on a volume of the *Trigun Maximum* manga indicated that the storyline will involve Vash versus Wolfwood.

BLASTING OFF

The android *Astro Boy* may lack a soul, but he's officially got a voice. IMAGI studios has announced that *Spiderwick Chronicles* star Freddie Highmore will play the title character in the 2009 CGI *Astro Boy* movie. No word yet on whether he will be required to wear boy-panties for the role.

GURREN TO THE MOVIES

Mega-hit anime *Gurren Lagann* will hit Japanese theaters as well as TV screens in the next year. Details remain sparse, but Kadokawa Shoten will produce the theatrical story of a robot-piloting boy who drills his way out of an underground village and into the stars above.

■ Angela Hanson



TRIGUN



LILY PADDED

Indie animator Frogman makes it big

It takes guts for a person to call himself Frogman. But it takes downright talent to do all that Frogman's done. Not only does he write and direct his animated creations, he designs the characters, edits, provides voices and animates them himself.

After growing frustrated with the career opportunities in existing production companies, Frogman, whose real name is Ryo Ono, began posting his own Flash cartoons on the web in 2004. Their popularity led to a television deal for his series *The Frogman Show*.

Success on TV led to success on the big screen. Frogman made *Eagle Talon the Movie: The Chancellor Only Lives Twice* with studio Kaerutoko Shokai, which also teamed with him on the comedy feature *Sguy and The Family Stone the Movie*.

The homegrown animator is currently working on a sequel, *Eagle Talon The Movie II — The Island Nation is to the Left of Tottori* (title subject to change), and it will debut in Japanese theaters this summer. ■ *Danica Davidson*

RAISING THE CURTAIN

More anime that deserve musicals

Forget about fighting demons—what the four main men of *Saiyuki* really want to do is sing, according to the recent news that the series will become a musical in Japan. Inspired, we drafted a list of other series that need a little rhythm.

KANON

There's one thing missing from this anime about sad girls in snow, and that's the sad girls singing about just how sad they are. While sitting in the snow. Two words: power ballads.

NOEIN

Geek rock takes on a whole new meaning in this musical. Between epic fights, characters will sing catchy tunes about the wonders of string theory and whether Schrödinger's cat is alive or dead.

DRAGON BALL Z: THE OPERA

Because there is no one who doesn't want to watch six hours of Goku and Vegeta singing long arias at each other about just how powerful they are. *No one*.

HELL GIRL

The ultimate musical experience. As Ai sends her victims to Hell, the cast will also sing a variety of catchy pop tunes such as "I hope you suffer for eternity" and "Take that, sucker." ■ *Megan Rebeck*



SAIYUKI'S GOKU

CASTINGCALL

Black Lagoon

Rokuro Okajima's life used to be boring, before he was taken hostage and ended up joining a violent mercenary group. Whether it's Stockholm Syndrome or just a welcome change of pace, he's living in a different world, one that would make an awesome action movie—and we've got just the cast.



KELLY HU
as **REVV**

Rude, crude and quick to anger, Revy makes a questionable friend but a great ally when it comes to the Lagoon Company's business practices. Just don't get on her bad side or she'll kill without remorse—a lot like Hu's Lady Deathstrike in *X2*.



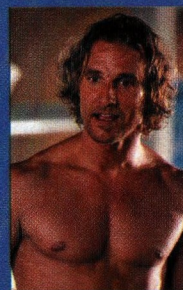
EDWARD NORTON
as **ROCK**

Rock Okajima was just a normal, hapless salaryman until he joined up with Dutch's crew and was immediately surrounded by violent, semi-sane people. Norton went through a similar change in *Fight Club*, so he can pull off the budding mercenary-in-training.



VING RHAMES
as **DUTCH**

No one's tougher than Dutch, ex-Navy captain and leader of the Lagoon Company. But Ving Rhames (*Mission: Impossible 3*) is strong and scary enough to come close, so we'll give him the role and run away before he looks at us funny.



MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY
as **BENNY**

Benny's no gunfighter, but he keeps the Lagoon Company's mechanics and computers going to keep the group chugging along. McConaughey, who displayed his own capacity for scruffiness in *Sahara*, is aptly suited to act as support crew.

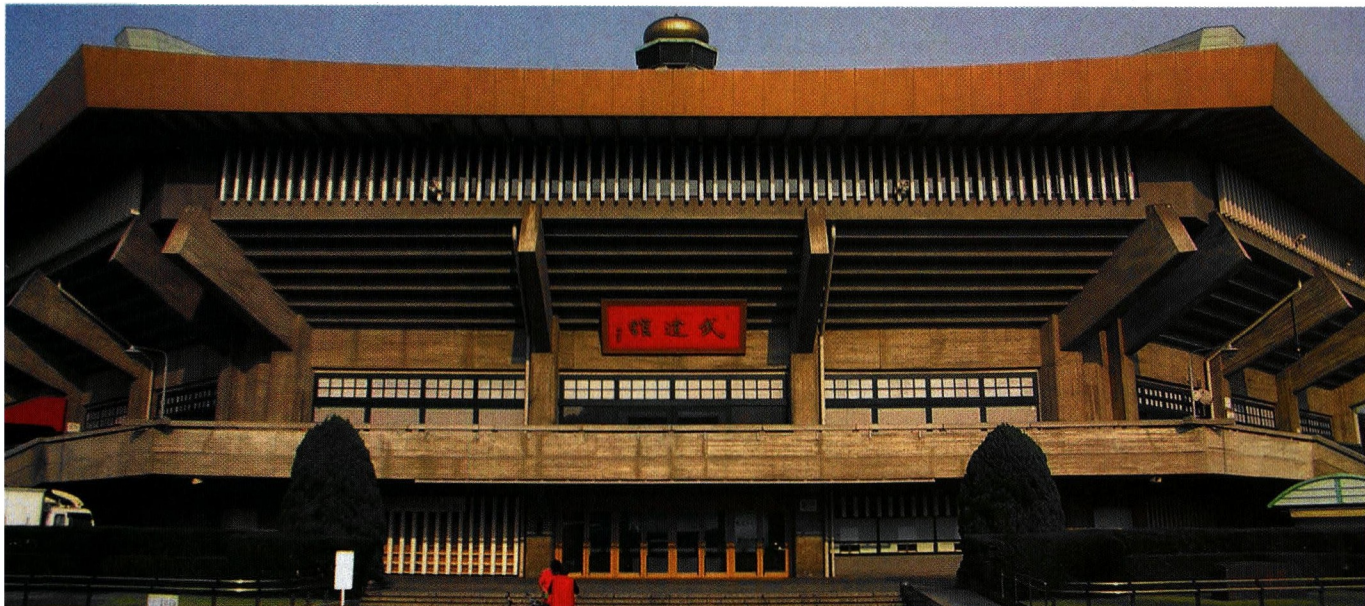


CATE BLANCHETT
as **BALALAIKA**

The boss of mafia group Hotel Moscow is not someone you want to mess with, but she's also honorable enough to earn respect from the Lagoon Company. Blanchett was another fierce ruler in *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, so the Russian mob should be easy. ■ *AH*

LIVE AT BUDOKAN

Historic arena proves that even buildings can change careers



Nippon Budokan was meant to be a sports arena, and technically that's what it is. But even though the building was constructed to showcase the judo contests in the 1964 Summer Olympics, its name can almost be filed under "concert hall" in the thesaurus. For while it's still occasionally used to host sports affairs, the main events at Nippon Budokan are some of the most coveted concerts in the world.

You might blame The Beatles for this, because they started it. The British pop band performed at Nippon Budokan in 1966, despite protests. At the time, many Japanese people were offended to see a band, let alone a foreign band, playing in a place revered for martial arts displays. However, not only did The Beatles hit it off well, more and more concerts began to take place in this Olympic

building. Bob Dylan performed there a few years later, and since then, Nippon Budokan has hosted a cavalcade of Western bands, like Ozzy Osborne, Pearl Jam, The Smashing Pumpkins, KISS and Del Rey manga girl Avril Lavigne, many of whom have made it almost a commonplace practice to record live concerts at Budokan for CD release.

But don't get the impression that it's all about Western bands. Glay is a huge name in J-rock, having sold about 35 million records, and it was top news when this band spent three days performing at Nippon Budokan. L'Arc-en-Ciel, which most anime fans know from its themes to *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *GTO* and *Rurouni Kenshin*, has sold out many a show at the historic arena. The band Nightmare has a less than cheerful name, but its record sales have been a dream come

true. It's done work for such popular anime as the mega hit *Death Note* and *Claymore*. And yep, it's performed at Nippon Budokan too. Not to mention X Japan, LUNA SEA, The Gazette, m-flo and many others. The uber-theatrical band Malice Mizer even released a DVD of its stop at Nippon Budokan, which included stage props that transformed the place into a gothic cathedral.

Located not too far from the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, Nippon Budokan is also used every August to commemorate those who died in World War II, with the Emperor himself playing a role. So just because a building's made to be one thing doesn't mean it can't have an exciting life in other areas. For that, you can blame The Beatles.

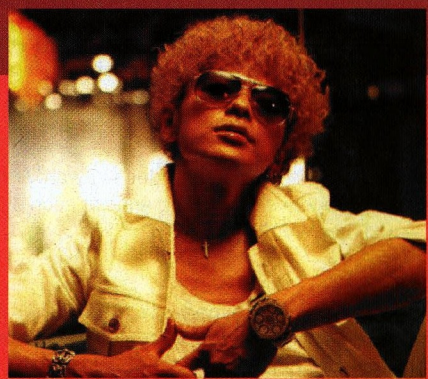
■ Danica Davidson

BACKSTAGEPASS

Spotlight on DJ OZMA

Pop singer DJ Ozma knows how to stir up controversy. At 2006's "Kohaku Uta Gassen," Japan's annual TV and radio music performance show, his dancers shocked audiences across the country when they stripped down to what looked like their birthday suits. It turned out that they were all wearing bodysuits that were painted to look like the nude human form, but it was a little too graphic for some viewers, particularly parents whose chil-

dren were up to watch the program. The DJ himself would later apologize, but as they say, there's no such thing as bad publicity, and the incident only increased his exposure. Not only has he not been banished from the music world, he's contributed theme songs to the *Naruto: Shippuden* movie and April's *Shin chan* movie. This almost-naked guy is a perfect fit for a show about a little boy who can't ever keep his pants on. ■ DD



NIPPON BUDOKAN PHOTO: MORIO, DJ OZMA: TOSHIBA EMI

SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE

Bright colors take over the previously gothic J-rock scene



Visual kei's predominantly gothic styling has been turning heads since the 1980s. However, some people say the genre of costumed heavy rock has lost its dark appeal, and now a breakaway subset

called oshare kei is seeing increasing popularity.

Technically, oshare kei is part of visual kei. Visual kei means "visual style," and can refer to any kind of band whose look is dramatic, deliberate and central to the band's popularity. However, traditionally, visual kei bands have had darker, gloomier looks coupled with shocking rock music. The breakaway oshare kei favors brighter, happier colors, and its songs deal with lighter subjects like being in love, though it still has a hip, punky feel.

The term oshare kei was first used in the early 2000s for the band Baroque, and is now used to describe bands like Ayabie, PANIC*ch and An Café. One recent band with this theme is SuG, which is releasing its first album this month.

Styles come and go, so you can expect more subgenres of visual kei to pop up in the future, but throughout it all, you can always expect J-rock bands to look too stylish for this world. ■ DD

SOMETHING'S FISHY

Japan's bestselling single goes back three decades



While there is no end to songs about love, loss and angst, it's rare to find a song about baked goods. And it's even more unusual for that song to become a country's number one selling single of all time! But then

you've never heard "Oyoge! Taiyaki-kun," a 1970s children's song about a delicious confection that just entered the Guinness Book of World Records as Japan's biggest single ever.

Taiyaki is a popular Japanese food consisting of a pancake-like batter that is poured into a fish-shaped mold to cook. Usually, it's filled with sweet red beans or a creamy custard, but at times it can be stuffed with sausage and other less sugary foods.

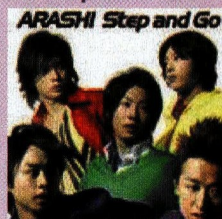
In the song, a cute taiyaki (affectionately given the honorific "-kun") decides he wants to live in the sea. For a while he's free in the ocean, only to be caught and eaten anyway. It sounds pretty gruesome, and yet it was used on a kids' TV show. The children who once listened to it are now adults swayed by sweet memories, and they're keeping Taiyaki-kun in the spotlight, with sales now around five million. Still, while the poor fish keeps getting eaten over and over again, singer Masato Shimon only got paid once for this mega-hit. ■ DD

POPTOP

To really understand Japan's sometimes-eclectic taste in music, check out what's on top of the weekly ORICON charts. ORICON stands for "original confidence" and is the Japanese equivalent of our Billboard charts.

WEEKLY TOP 10 SINGLES

1. Step and Go ARASHI



The five-member boy band isn't content with its 17th number-one hit single. In between their busy TV and movie careers, the members are currently hosting a TV variety show focusing on social issues. How they will fit the TV appearances into their concurrent arena tour of Japan is anyone's guess.

2. Soba ni Iru ne THELMA AOYAMA

FEAT. SOULJA

3. Heart Station/Stay Gold HIKARU UTADA

4. Umiyuki JERO

While not related to anime, enka singer Jero merits a mention... since he's from Pittsburgh! Five years ago, Jero promised his dying Japanese grandmother that he would become an enka singer in Japan, and he's definitely delivered.

5. Home SHOTA SHIMIZU

6. Canvas/Kimi wa su*te•ki KEN HIRAI

"Canvas" is the theme to the live-action *Honey and Clover* drama that started airing in Japan in January. Ken Hirai's soulful voice is the perfect fit for this series about college love.

7. Genkai Funa Uta KIYOSHI HIKAWA

8. Ogon Soul SHONANNOKAZE

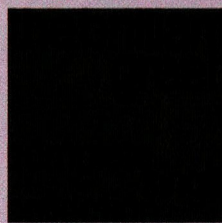
9. Monochrome BENNIE K

10. Lips KAT-TUN

Idol group KAT-TUN provides the theme (and the star, singer Kazuya Kamenashi) for the live-action *One Pound Gospel*/TV series, based on the manga by Rumiko Takahashi. *One Pound Gospel* has never been animated, but the live-action format arrived just as Takahashi was completing the manga series' 20-year run.

WEEKLY TOP 10 ALBUMS

1. The Brilliant Green Complete Single Collection '97-'08



THE BRILLIANT GREEN

This singles collection includes "Ash Like Snow," a theme for *Gundam 00*. Member Tomoko Kawase formed her own solo act as Tommy february6 and contributed a theme to *Paradise Kiss*. What was the release date for "Ash Like Snow"? February 6, of course.

2. Black List ACID BLACK CHERRY

3. Wish YUNA ITO

4. Life Album IKIMONO GAKARI

The rock band's latest album includes "Seishun Line," from the baseball anime *Ookiku Furikabutte*. The group has also contributed songs to *Bleach* and *Ayakashi Ayashi*.

5. Award Supernova -Loves Best M-FLO

6. Sugar TOKIO

The pop group's latest mini-album includes "Hikari no Machi" from *The Skull Man*.

7. Thriller 25th Anniversary Expanded Edition MICHAEL JACKSON

8. Sentimental Macchiato SID

9. Philharmonic or Die QURULI

10. Jupiter ~Hirahara Ayaka Best~ AYAKA HIRAHARA

■ Summer Mullins

Weekly ranking on Oricon charts for February 25, 2008.

BIG BANG THEORY

'Bangai-O Spirits' brings massive destruction to the DS

The 2-D shooter is coming back. From Xbox Live Arcade to the Wii's Virtual Console, gamers everywhere are rediscovering the twitchy joy of surviving (or not) intense battles with swarms of enemies. It's this climate that makes *Bangai-O Spirits* for the DS such a welcome sight.

Bangai-O, originally released on the Nintendo 64 and Dreamcast, came to the market after many had already been lured away by the siren's call of 3-D gaming, but the game's inventiveness brought it well-deserved acclaim. Players took control of Riki and Mami, pilots of a mechanized battlesuit called Bangai-O, and took on the SF Kosmo Gang, intergalactic mobsters and hoarders of "space fruit." Their mission? Blow up *everything*.

Now, *Bangai-O* is reborn as *Bangai-O Spirits*. Though the game is technically a remake, *Spirits* recreates only the style, speed and action of the first game, giving it all-new levels, more weapons and some truly original special features.

Riki and Mami have been replaced by the slightly less cute Bangai-O pilots Masato and Ruri, who have access to a variety of new weapons, including an energy sword and a baseball bat with the ability to deflect missiles. Every weapon has its pros and cons, and you'll have to think fast to choose the best combination, because you're soon besieged by hordes of enemy mecha.

Bangai-O Spirits is not for the timid. Rather than cater to shooter newbies, Treasure has created a title that will put even hardcore shooter fans to the test, as the onscreen enemies can number in the hundreds—and the same can go for the resulting explosions once you unleash a barrage of powered-up missiles.

In fact, players are actually rewarded

for rushing into battle. The more enemies onscreen, the more glorious the victory and the bigger your point bonus. You can also boost your score the old-fashioned way: by grabbing the fruit left over when enemies vaporize.

What's more, *Spirits* is expected to feature over 150 levels of alien-blasting action. Still not happy? Custom-edited levels can be shared with a unique "Sound Load" system, which bypasses the DS's wireless link in favor of sounds played through the speaker and received through the handheld's microphone.

The sheer number of enemy fighters could intimidate even the most-seasoned shooter veteran, but don't despair, because *Spirits* also provides cooperative play with up to four players. So suit up, because *Bangai-O Spirits* invades the U.S. this summer.

■ Christina Ellis

WHY'D I ASK
FOR RABBIT EARS?
WHY, WHY, WHY?



EYE OF THE GIGER No retro-styled action game is complete without an *Alien* homage, and *Bangai-O Spirits* knows it.



SOCCER RIOT *Bangai-O Spirits'* strange array of power-ups includes bouncing shots, a laser sword and even a baseball bat.



SEEK AND DESTROY Missiles remain the Bangai-O's primary weapon, capable of intercepting hundreds of enemies at once.

BACK IN BLACK

'Ninja Gaiden 2' storms the Xbox 360

Ryu Hayabusa and the *Ninja Gaiden* name have been around since the NES days, but it was in 2004 that they made one of the biggest gaming comebacks ever, when Tecmo expanded the series into glorious 3-D with *Ninja Gaiden* for the Xbox. The incredible graphics and lightning-fast combat turned Ryu's adventures into a fantastic ballet of violence. Expanded versions of the original have already appeared, but now a sequel is coming to the Xbox 360.

Fresh from defeating the evil Vigor Empire, Ryu finds himself stuck in the middle of an ancient ninja clan feud that unleashes a plague of demons. Fortunately, Ryu has a plethora of new weapons, including claws, tonfas and a scythe seemingly borrowed from the previous game's demon hunter, Rachael—who may show up as well.

Also returning are Ryu's tenacious swarms of foes, and merely slicing off a few limbs may not be enough to stop them; you'll need to use brand new Obliteration techniques to finish them off. Ryu also has access to a form of ninja healing, and a refined magic, or ninpo, system. Good thing, too, because there are more than ninjas after him. Enemies range from humans to giant spiders and even werewolves.

Ninja Gaiden 2 will see a U.S. release on June 3, 2008. ■ CE



NINJA GAIDEN 2



TALES OF VESPERIA

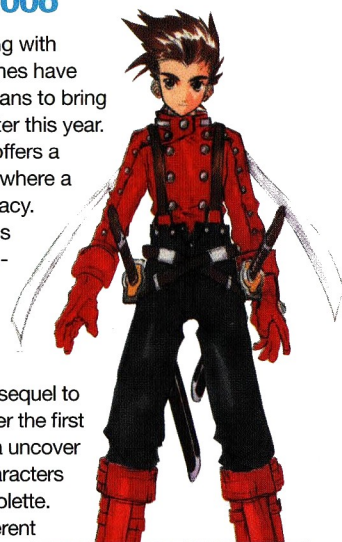
NEW TALES TO TELL

Namco delivers 'Symphonia' sequel and all-new 'Vesperia' for 2008

Blending anime-style RPG storytelling with action-based battles, the *Tales* games have won the hearts of many, and Namco plans to bring two new additions to North America later this year.

Tales of Vesperia on the Xbox 360 offers a world powered by ancient technology, where a knight named Yuri must stop a conspiracy. *Vesperia* will feature an all-new graphics engine, the art of frequent *Tales* character designer Kosuke Fujishima (*Oh My Goddess!*) and combat sequences on huge battlefields.

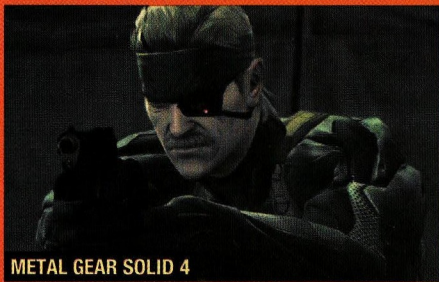
Coming to the Wii is *Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World*, a sequel to the 2004 Gamecube title. Two years after the first *Symphonia*, new heroes Emil and Marta uncover a mystery while crossing paths with characters from the original, including Lloyd and Colette. The Wii sequel also offers over 200 different monsters to battle at your side. ■ CE



TALES OF SYMPHONIA'S LLOYD

CONTINUE?

The latest gaming news and previews



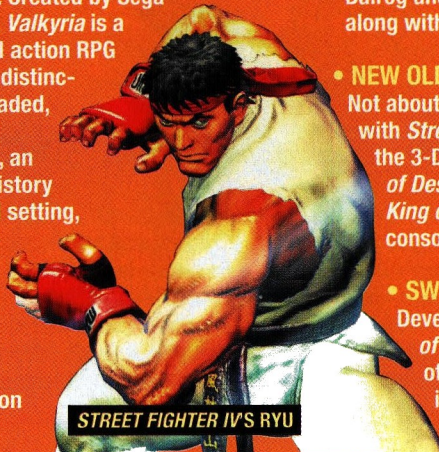
METAL GEAR SOLID 4

• SOLID BUNDLE

Sony surprised many when it discontinued the *Motorstorm* PlayStation 3 bundle, but the recently announced replacement explains everything. Coming June 12, the new bundle includes the 80GB PS3, a DualShock 3 controller (with six-axis motion control as well as rumble) and the eagerly anticipated PS3 exclusive, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*.

• RIDE OF VALKYRIA

Valkyria Chronicles, previously known as *Valkyrie of the Battlefield: Gallian Chronicles*, is coming to the U.S. in the fall of 2008. Created by Sega developers, *Valkyria* is a PS3 tactical action RPG featuring a distinctive cell-shaded, sketch-like visual style, an alternate-history World War I setting, and squad-based strategic gameplay paired with third-person action sequences.



STREET FIGHTER IV'S RYU

• STREET FIGHTING MEN

Already in location tests in Tokyo, Capcom's *Street Fighter IV* added two more returning characters: the boxer Balrog and the muay thai warrior Sagat, along with an all-new wrestler, El Fuerte.

• NEW OLD CONTENDERS

Not about to let Capcom hog the spotlight with *Street Fighter IV*, SNK is prepping the 3-D fighter *Samurai Shodown: Edge of Destiny* and the high-definition 2-D *King of Fighters XII* for arcades and consoles.

• SWORD STING

Developer Sting announced *Knights of the Nightmare*, the fourth part of the Dept Heaven series, which includes the RPGs *Riviera* and *Yggdra Union*. ■ CE

videogamereleases MAY

BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED

As a new 3-D *Bionic Commando* makes its way to the major consoles, Capcom and Swedish developer GRIN deliver a glitzy remake of the original to Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network. The *Rearmed* version of the game captures the same 2-D design and many faithful stage layouts of the NES original, but with sharp new visual style and some all-important tweaks that refine the now-classic grappling-arm gameplay. Players can pick and throw enemies, but will our commando hero still get to blow up a Hitler clone's head during the grand finale? (Capcom, PSN/Xbox Live, \$10)

GRAN TURISMO 5: PROLOGUE

Long renowned for solid physics and incredible attention to detail, the *Gran Turismo* series has earned a reputation for delivering the most realistic racing simulations around. Now exclusively on the PS3, *Gran Turismo 5: Prologue* takes the franchise to HD. The "Prologue" of the title means that it's a precursor to the full version of *GT5*, due out in 2009, but it still delivers over 50 different cars, five different tracks, and 16-player online racing, all rendered in butter-smooth resolution. (SCEA, PS3, \$39.99)



JAKE HUNTER: DETECTIVE CHRONICLES

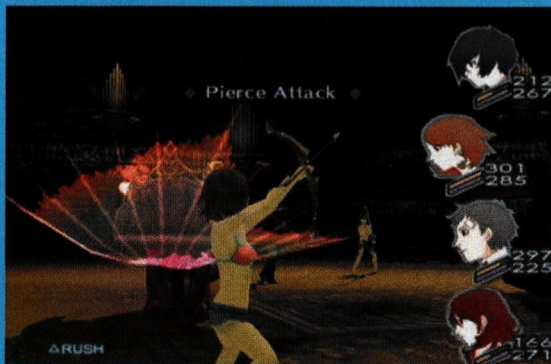
Following the path forged by *Phoenix Wright* and *Hotel Dusk*, *Jake Hunter* is a graphic adventure game with a noir angle and a long history of Japan-only releases (under the title *Tantei Saburo Jinguji*). Though not as earnestly weird as Phoenix's cases, Jake's hard-boiled mysteries include similarly bizarre cases of murder, missing persons and twisted betrayals. And, like Phoenix, Jake finds the truth through gameplay driven primarily by conversations, pointed questioning and stylus-based detective work. (Aksys Games, DS, \$19.99)

MUSTPLAY

Persona 3: FES

Persona 3's unique gameplay and pitch-black storyline earned it cult status last year, though many gamers overlooked this unusual gem. Now this quirky RPG is getting a director's cut. *Persona 3: FES* (the "FES" is short for "festival") features new events, new cutscenes and 30 hours of new story taking place both during and after the original storyline.

Persona 3 combines elements of Japanese dating simulations and turn-based RPGs; during the day, you're a transfer student, new to Gekkoukan High School, and you'll spend your time attending classes, making friends and even studying. At night, however, there comes the dark hour when mysterious forces known as the Shadows prey on the oblivious students. You and select others can summon "Personas" to battle these creatures in the dark world of Tartarus, and characters do that by metaphysically shooting themselves in the head. Your combat abilities, however, are directly linked to the relationships and activities that you pursued during the day. At a mere \$29.99, *FES* is worth a look for both existing fans and newcomers. ■ CE



MARIO KART WII

Mario Kart's known for the most accessibly fun racing in the gaming industry, and the Wii edition fully exploits the system's motion-sensing remote by fitting it into a larger wheel (which is included with the game). The racing itself supports online play, along with over 30 different courses and the option to race as one of your Miis. The biggest chance, however, might be in the vehicles—you can ditch the kart for a sharp-turning motorbike. (Nintendo, Wii, \$49.99)

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: EXPLORERS OF DARKNESS

Perfect for those demented kids who actually want to be Pokémon, *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness* puts players in the role of a human transformed, and the Pokémon you'll play is based on the results of your personality test. Once your form has been selected, you embark on a quest to change yourself back by rescuing trapped Pokémon from a series of dungeons. Unlike the primary Pokémon games,



Mystery Dungeon is a turn-based dungeon hack which allows you to tackle labyrinths, one randomly generated layer at a time. (Nintendo, DS, \$34.99)

R-TYPE COMMAND

R-Type is a name familiar to fans of old-school side-scrolling shooters, but with *Command*, the series explores the world of hex-based tactical strategy games. In a war against the Bydo Empire, players take charge of entire squadrons of fighters while attempting to penetrate the Bydo defenses and ensure humanity's survival. With over 100 different units at your command, you can even take on a friend in local head-to-head multiplayer and, for the first time in *R-Type* history, you can even take control of the Bydo forces. (Atlus, PSP, \$39.99)

PUCHI PUCHI VIRUS

The DS has proved a haven for wacky puzzle games of all stripes, but rarely do they allow you to destroy viral infections with the power of "pure awesome." It seems that the "puchi-rus" has turned all inhabitants of a town into party animals, each with a pun-heavy nickname, and it's up to Doctor Kevin and his nurses to save the day. The game challenges you to clear virus particles in a certain order or with a certain strategy by tapping virulent blobs on the bottom screen while your nurses panic on the top. (NIS, DS, \$29.99)

FROM MY COLD, DEAD FEELERS!



PUCHI PUCHI VIRUS' SPY DEWEBB

SUPER DODGEBALL BRAWLERS

Dodgeball has a reputation for being less about sportsmanship and athleticism than about pasting the other guy with a rubber ball, but *Super Dodgeball Brawlers* takes it a step farther by allowing you to literally attack the other team. Harkening back to the classic *Super Dodgeball* and *River City Ransom* for the NES, *Brawlers* features the distinctive Kunio character designs: beefy guys with heads as big as the rest of their torsos. *Brawlers* provides classic dodgeball action but also features over 100 special attack throws, as well as the ability to just punch your opponent in the stomach. (Aksys, DS, \$29.99)

TAMAGOTCHI CONNECTION CORNER SHOP 3

Fans of those cute little virtual pets have a new collection of mini-games on hand. As with the previous installments, *Tamagotchi Connection Corner Shop 3* tasks you with keeping the residents of Tamagotchi Town happy, whether it's by helping them dig for fossils, singing to their plants or even just serving them ice cream. *Corner Shop 3* maintains the kid-friendly, ultra-cute style and presents some innovative uses of the stylus and microphone. *Tamagotchi Connection* isn't for everyone, but for young gamers and the cuter-critter-loving demographic, the shop is worth a visit. (Namco Bandai, DS, \$29.99)

IMPORTREPORT



AERIAL PLANET

A different sort of flight sim, *Aerial Planet* sends its hero gliding through open air in a search for a downed space station. Presented by From Software (*Armored Core*) and Nippon Ichi (*Disgaea*), *Aerial Planet* emphasizes mood, flying technique and other things that'll probably enrage action-seeking gamers. *Disgaea* fans, however, can fly alongside Prinnyes. (PS2)



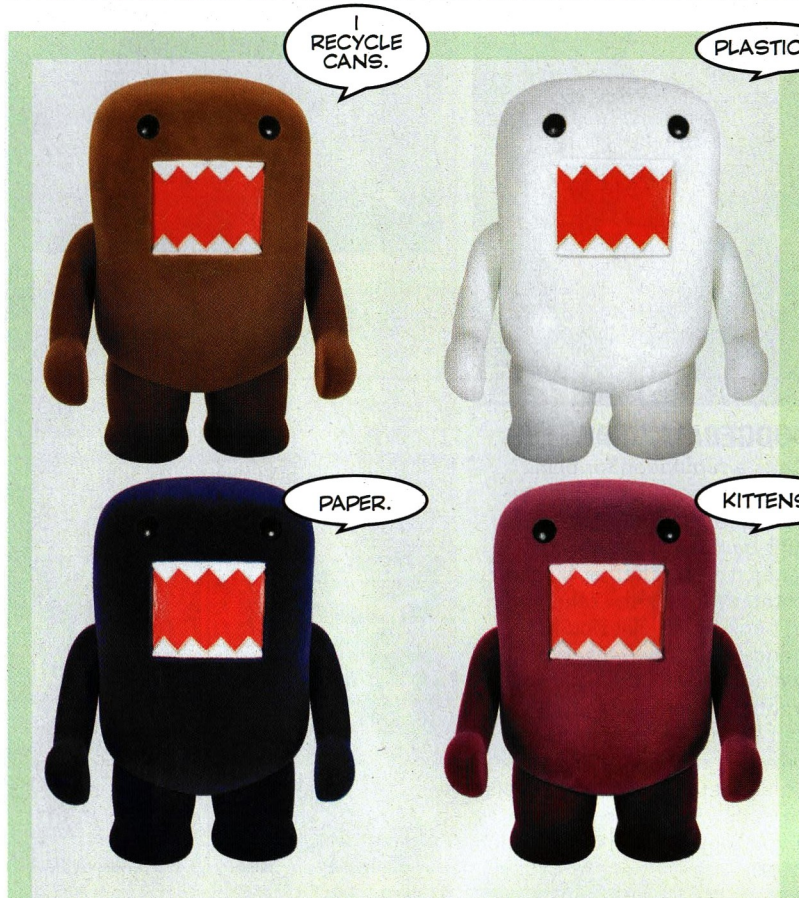
HOKUTO NO KEN

The full title is *Hokuto no Ken: Hokuto Shinken Denshousha no Michi*, but we in the West can think of it as yet another *Fist of the North Star* carnage-fest. Though it looks like a digital comic, the game demands DS stylus work whenever wandering hero Kenshiro is called upon to dispense head-exploding justice. (DS)



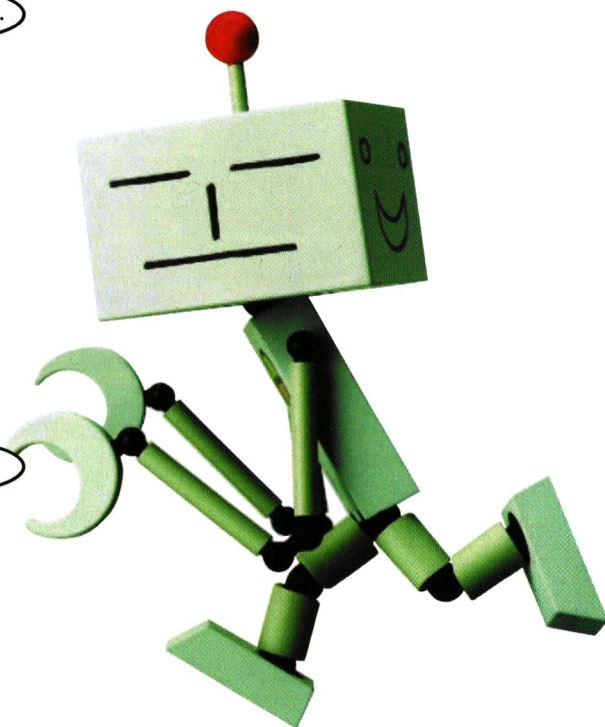
SOMA BRINGER

For its first Nintendo-backed project, *Xenosaga* developer Monolith turns out an action-RPG. *Soma Bringer's* story concerns a mysterious girl brought to a medieval-fantasy stage by a UFO, but the game's drawn more attention for its diverse options and customizable multi-character battles. (DS) ■ Todd Ciolek



FUZZIE WUZZIE

Domo, the cuddly creature with the mouth of a monster, is making the leap from being the mascot of NHK television in Japan to starring in his own animated shorts on Nickelodeon. In the inevitable rush of merchandise comes this line of 8-inch figures flocked for extra softness and available in four different colors. (Dark Horse, \$39.99 each)



BRAND NAMES

In Japan, even company mascots get action figures if they're cute enough. Sony Japan's cat Toro got his own videogame, *Doko Demo Issyo*, and now he's got friends. His rose rabbit pal Jun comes with a microphone to live out his idol dreams, and the robotic Suzuki (above) has four faces. Both 5-inch figures are made with the ultra-poseable Revoltech joint system. (Revoltech, \$22.99 each)

GUNDAM IN MY POCKET



At 4 inches tall, now the latest state-of-the-art robot fighting for freedom can go anywhere you do. Piloted by Setsuna F. Seiei in the new *Gundam 00*, the Gundam Exia arrives with a GN shield, beam saber, beam dagger, short blade, long blade and sword that can also switch to rifle mode, essentially making it the world's first Swiss Army Gundam. (Bandai, \$48.99)

GOD OF WAR

At 12 inches tall, the star mecha of the 1981 anime *Six God Combination Godmars* will reign supreme over other 'bots in your collection. Ordinary kid Takeru finds out that he's really an alien prince who's supposed to destroy Earth. Instead, he wants to protect it, even if it means fighting his own twin brother. These are rough revelations, but at least he gets a super-sweet six-in-one robot as compensation. (Bandai, \$230.99)



DEATH AT HAND

Along with telling a complex story about morality and semi-godhood, *Death Note* has plenty of great gothic illustrations. Hardcore fans can incorporate the look of the series into their daily gear with this embroidered leather wristband.

(GE Animation, \$6.99)



WILD GIRLS

Werewolves and vampires really can become good friends, but you'd never know it from looking at this 8.5-inch PVC state of Reiri Kamura and her half-breed friend/rival Riza Wildman from *Princess Resurrection*. Reiri's got specific tastes: she prefers blood from attractive royalty.

(Happinet, \$109.99)



GUN?
WHAT GUN?

SITTING PRETTY

Along with doing her job and taking care of her young charges, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s Misato Katsuragi knows two things are important: beer and looking good. She more than takes care of the latter in this 8-inch PVC statue. It's a nice way for fans to commemorate the new *Evangelion 1.0* movie, but Misato prefers her celebrations with lager.

(Kotobukiya, \$59.99)



THE BEAST WITHIN

The parade of figures based on the piloted mechas of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* never ends, but this new 8-inch Soul of Chogokin Unit-02 comes with a creepy bonus: beneath its removable outer casing is the living creature that forms the heart of the Eva! Accessories include a machine gun, entry plug, umbilical cable and more, but we're already grossed out enough to surrender. (Bandai, \$62.99)

DREAM OF FLYING

The latest figure in the Fräulein Revoltech line is a brand new character from a familiar source. The 6-inch Pocco hails from the artbook *Sweet Dreams* by *Final Fantasy X* illustrator Shunya Yamashita. With a broadsword and 20 points of articulation, Pocco combines avenging angel with a semi-steampunk look to fit right in with *Final Fantasy*'s typical ridiculous-but-loveable fashion. (Revoltech, \$28.99)



BACK IN BLACK

The figurative tributes to Osamu Tezuka, the "god of manga," continue with 3-inch characters from *Black Jack* and *Phoenix*, two of his best-loved manga series. Black Jack is an unlicensed doctor and a genius who assists in the most bizarre medical cases, while Phoenix is pulled from the ambitious, long-running manga that Tezuka himself considered to be his greatest work. (Organic Hobby, \$12.99 each)



THANKSJAPAN

Cool and crazy swag from overseas

UNLOCK NO JUTSU

Keychain Kakashi makes a fierce yet adorable ninja, but his sharingan eye looks more like a raging case of pinkeye. Unhealthy!



TWO, FOUR, SIX, EIGHT

Who do we appreciate? Whoever keeps approving more Haruhi Suzumiya merchandise. None of it's really necessary, but if we get Haruhi as an adorable cheerleader, do we care?



A WING AND A PRAYER

This PVC figure of Sakura from *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle* makes a cool desk accessory, but not as cool as her own accessory—the world-bending Mokona.



COME THE REVOLUTION

Who was clamoring for a Kewpie doll cosplaying as Oscar from *The Rose of Versailles*? Well...no one. But they made a cell phone charm of it anyway. Go figure.

■ Angela Hanson



BATTY BUNNY

Pani Poni Dash's Mesousa is an adorable rabbit mascot who's got serious depression issues, but this toy version of him should just make you smile.



anime

INSIDER 超月刊誌

#57

GARAGE SALE!

SPECIAL DEALS:

FEATURES ON XXXHOLIC'S COLLECTION
OF PRICELESS KNICK-KNACKS, EMMA'S
MAID SERVICES FOR A DAY, TOKYO
PHOTOS, MANGA PREVIEWS AND MORE!

OPENS

5/21 in comic stores
6/3 on newsstands

NO EARLY BIRDS!

GOLDEN DAYS

A week with four holidays becomes Japan's national vacation in May

If Valentine's Day is mainly associated with the sale of cards and candy, Japan's "Golden Week" may well trace itself back to movie ticket sales. At least, that's where the week in early May got its name. While some of the week's holidays date back to before movies, it was the managing director of Daiei Films, now Kadokawa Pictures (*The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, *The Third*), who gave the week this title, all because of the major increase in ticket sales theaters saw during this week packed with various national holidays. And since Japan also has a law declaring that a day sandwiched between two national holidays is also a national holiday, Japan's Golden Week is one of the biggest vacation periods in the year.

Golden Week itself has changed over time. It always starts on April 29, the birthday of Emperor Hirohito, posthumously called Emperor Showa in Japan. During Hirohito's lifetime his birthday was a national holiday, proving emperorship has some nice benefits. Upon his death, April 29 was changed to Greenery Day. This was in honor of the environment and Hirohito's struggles to protect it. The holiday soon took another change, with April 29 officially becoming Showa Day and Greenery Day being bumped to later in the week.

May 3 is Constitution Day, or *Kenpo kinenbi* in Japanese. On this day in 1947, Japan issued a new constitution for its country. Coincidentally, May 3 is also Hina Matsuri, a day celebrating girls, though it doesn't get quite the pomp that Constitution Day does. Girls are celebrated with displays of traditionally dressed dolls and peach blossoms. The dolls come from an ancient Chinese belief that bad things meant to happen to the person will go into the doll instead. With women's increasing power in Japan, there are some



ONE FISH, TWO FISH, RED FISH, BLUE FISH Colorful koinobori decorations are only part of Golden Week's many celebrations.

who argue that Girls' Day should get more respect. At the same time, girls are being celebrated more on what used to be Boys' Day but is now Children's Day.

Since 2007, May 4 has been the new Greenery Day. Even before last year, the fourth was a holiday, but it was only considered one because it fell between two other holidays. Now it's all about the environment, although a few people are probably just happy to get out of work and school.

The final holiday of the week is on May 5, and while it used to be called Boys' Day, recent strides for equality have seen it dubbed

Children's Day, to honor both little boys and girls. It became a national holiday in the 1940s, and tradition dictates the flying of koinobori. Koinobori, to put it simply, are carp decorations meant to symbolize family members. This is a day to send out prayers for the youngsters—and to eat mochi rice cakes!

Golden Week incorporates four days celebrating nature, children and Japan's national identity. You could say it's one of the happiest times in the country, and an excellent time for all the vacations that are taken during it. But the traffic's got to be lousy. ■ *Danica Davidson*

EAT IT

Saku-saku Panda

By chowing down on these adorable chocolate-and-cracker panda snacks, each of which has a different expression, you are also giving to the World Wildlife Fund. Tasty and eco-friendly!



DRINK IT

Ume Kuensan 2000RJ

Japan's not lacking in the power drink arena; this one from Sapporo includes 200 mg of royal jelly (a secretion of queen bees), while the plum juice adds a tart flavor to pick up even the terminally tired.



CRANK IT

Fireplace Heater

It looks like a TV displaying a picture of a fireplace, but this LCD display is actually a space heater! All the warmth of a real fire without the mess.

■ *Summer Mullins*



SWEET DREAMS

Futons provide first-class sleep with a few simple parts

Even though most Japanese hotels have Western-style beds these days, you haven't had an authentic Japanese night's sleep until you've tried a futon. A far cry from the highly uncomfortable folding couches of the West, a real Japanese futon is a convenient, comfortable and beautiful way to sleep well—and you can store them during the day to free up some space in a typically tiny Tokyo apartment. Try that with a spring mattress! Just know one thing: putting them together and taking them apart are no easy tasks for the novice. A futon is basically made up of three primary parts:

SHIKIBUTON

This is the actual part for sleeping on, like a bed's mattress. They may look light, but they're actually quite heavy. Their flexible material allows them to be folded or hung over railings to dry. Japan's strong humidity means lots of drying time.

KAKEBUTON

It can get cold at night, so we have kakebuton. There's not much to explain here, except that instead of just being called a blanket, it gets a cool name for being part of a futon's wardrobe.

MAKURA

While Westerners are used to things like feathers stuffing their pillows, in Japan it's traditional for futon pillows, or makura, to be stuffed with beans. Yes, you heard right, and it's more comfortable than it sounds.

■ DD



JPN101

Learn Japanese (slowly)



This month's lesson: FAMILY MEMBERS

IMOTO (ee-mow-oh-toe) Younger sister. There are different words for younger and older siblings, which eliminate the need to ask who's older.

KANAI (kah-nah-ee) Wife.

KANOJO (kah-know-joe) Girlfriend. Specifically, it means a romantic girlfriend. Ladies, don't use this for your huge gaggle of female friends or you'll get some weird looks.

KARE (kah-rheh) Boyfriend. Same deal.

KAZOKU (kah-zoh-coo) Family.

MUSUKO (moo-sue-koh) Son.

MUSUME (moo-sue-meh) Daughter. Made famous to Americans by the everlasting girl band Morning Musume. Like Menudo, it has a revolving door and will never die.

OKAASAN (oh-kah-ah-san) Mother. The "o" in front of the names of elder members of the family is an honorific.

ONEESAN (oh-neigh-san) Older sister.

ONIISAN (oh-knee-san) Older brother.

OTOOSAN (oh-toe-oh-san) Father.

OTOOTO (oh-toe-oh-toe) Younger brother.

SHUJIN (shoe-jeen) Husband.

TOMODACHI (toe-mow-dah-chee) Friend.

DESU. This is my . ■ SM

TOKYO TRAVELOGUE

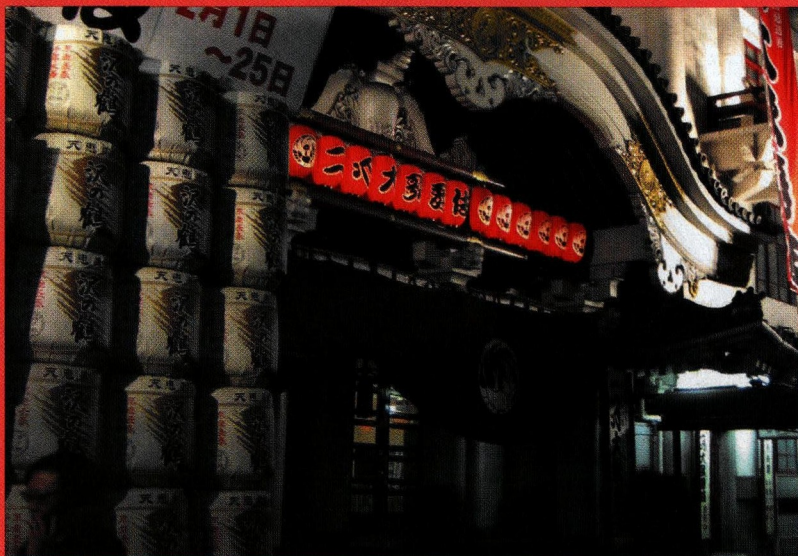
Kabuki-za Theater

Boasting a lot of greasepaint, big hair and some frightening, exaggerated facial expressions—not to mention archaic choreography and minimal music—it's no wonder that some young Japanese think of kabuki as an unintelligible art form that needs a good dusting after four centuries. Then again, Western kids often think the same about Shakespeare!

Yet kabuki has remained remarkably durable, and has in fact made a comeback in recent years, culminating in its nomination by UNESCO in 2005 as one of the "43 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity."

In Tokyo, kabuki is performed daily at the Kabuki-za theater in Ginza, a historic location first built in 1889 but destroyed (consecutively) by fire, earthquake and Allied bombing.

The current building, a reconstruction built after WWII, shows off a Japanese baroque style that is itself another reason to attend one of these vital Japanese cultural performances. ■ Andrez Bergen



partingshot

つづく

In Japan, chrysanthemums don't just make for pretty gardens. The flower is an icon of Japan itself and serves as the official Imperial seal. Even better, it's an excuse to party. During the annual September Chrysanthemum Festival, thousands of blooms go on display in eye-catching fashion. In one of the weirdest exhibitions, life-sized mannequins are dressed in bright clothes that consist entirely of chrysanthemum blossoms. It might even be the fashion trend of the future, but if you've got hay fever, you're out of luck. ■ *Angela Hanson*

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